

By COLONEL PRENTISS INGRAHAM.

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Buffalo Bill in Disguise.



THE WORDS OF BUFFALO BILL CAUSED THE GIRL TO START AND UTTER A CRY OF ALARM.

Buffalo Bill in Disguise:

OR,

The Boy Boomer at Danger Divide.

A Story of Dark Days and Troublous Times in Southwest Colorado.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM.

CHAPTER I.

A STRANGER IN DANGER DIVIDE.

"By Heaven, but they shall not down that boy. I'll help him out, if somebody's grave has to be dug."

The speaker was a stranger in Danger Divide, the worst of all mining camps of Colorado in early days.

He was seated at a table in an obscure part of a large gambling and drinking saloon combined, known as Gambler's Eden, though it was but a log building, a rude resort for men who put their all upon the turn of a card, and staked their lives at the revolver's muzzle as they did their gold, to win or lose.

Of all the two hundred men assembled in the "Eden," drinking, smoking, and gambling, either at the wheel of fortune or at the card tables, none were so striking in appearance as he who spoke the words that open this story.

He was a man among men to behold—tall, straight as an arrow, broad-shouldered and graceful, with the physique of an athlete.

His face was beardless, but darkly bronzed from exposure; his hair clung in clusters about his temples and neck, and his features were as perfect as an artist could have wished for.

In a parlor of fashion he would have been regarded as a strikingly handsome society man; but there, in that wild land, dressed in a velvet sack coat, white corduroy pants stuck in the tops of very elegant boots, wearing a white silk negligé shirt, with knotted black tie, and a gray, broad-brimmed slouch hat, he looked the picturesque border dandy, or sport, though not one man present knew who or what he was.

If he was armed, he did not show the fact, and he was the only man present whose revolvers and bowies were not in plain view.

He had arrived on the night stage, and after supper at the "House of Refuge," as the log inn was called, in Danger Divide, he had sauntered into the Gambler's Eden and seated himself in a remote part of the saloon.

There he had been calmly smoking a cigar and gazing about him upon the stirring scene, until a big bully spying him, had sauntered over near him, suddenly snatched the cigar from his lips, and, amid a burst of laughter, had put it in his own mouth, and walked over to the bar, upon which he leaned, his profile toward the man he had just insulted.

Then all present saw a startling sight, for the placid stranger had found a revolver somewhere, leveled it, and, as quick as a flash, had pulled trigger.

The bullet cut the ashes off the cigar in the bully's mouth, causing the sparks to fly, and, in the deathlike silence that followed the thud of lead, as it buried itself in the wall, came the calmly uttered words:

"Bring me my cigar or next time I'll cut it out from between your teeth!"

Not a sound was uttered, then. Every

eye was upon the bully alternately with the stranger.

The former stood, white with rage and fright, the cigar still between his teeth. The stranger sat perfectly still, but his hand holding the revolver rested upon the table at his side.

The man saw something in that calm face, heard a ring in the words addressed to him, that caused him to walk over to the table, in obedience to the command.

All present expected a trick, trouble, they knew not what.

Jack Dashaway, this bully, was well known in Danger Divide as a very dangerous man, and now he was face to face with an unknown who had shown a nerve and unerring aim that was a surprise and compelled admiration.

Would Jack Dashaway submit to the tables being turned upon him as they had by the stranger?

The crowd thought not.

Straight up to the stranger walked the braggart.

The stranger did not move; his face did not change a muscle.

Taking the cigar from between his teeth, the bully handed it to the stranger; but not, as all expected to see him, with his other hand draw a revolver, and said:

"Here's yer smoker, pard.

"I don't quarrel with no man as shoots as you does—I knows better."

"Thanks! Have a cigar, for it is a Havana?" and the stranger took two fresh cigars from a case, and handed one to the man whom he had won over by his wonderful aim.

"Thank yer, sir. May I jine yer at ther table, as soon as I axes yer pardon for the insult I give yer?"

"Oh, yes, sit down, and never mind the apology, for your returning the cigar atoned for that.

"My name is William Fredericks. I hail from the eastward, and am here to get gold, either with a pick or cards, as suits me best.

"Now you know all about me, and you are the first acquaintance I have made in Danger Divide."

"Ettykit, I s'pose, calls on me ter interdooce myself, sir, so I'll tell yer my name is Jack Dashaway, and I'm gold digger and all-round sport.

"But, your eastern name don't go here, for I takes ther liberty of changin' it, and hereby christens yer ther Quick Shot Sport, and a Gent in Velvet, as you is. Them names goes right here, Pard Fredericks."

Then, turning quickly toward the crowd, Jack Dashaway called out:

"Pards all, drink at my expense to my friend here, Quick Shot, the Gentleman in Velvet, and the man as don't drink has me to fight."

CHAPTER II.

A YOUNG TOUGH.

The stranger arose at the characteristic introduction, and, bowing to the crowd, then to Jack Dashaway, he said in a pleasant way:

"I am glad to meet you one and all, gentlemen. My friend at the bar will kindly give me a glass of water; I drink nothing stronger."

Jack Dashaway started. He had just said that the man who refused to drink had him to fight.

Was this a challenge from the stranger?

Others had the same idea, and all eyes were turned upon the new-comer.

But, he dashed off the glass of water which Piggy, the fat bartender, had brought to him, and then said:

"Fill up again all round, gentlemen, for you drink with me this time."

The crowd did fill up at the stranger's expense; and, seeing that he again took water, Jack Dashaway felt that he could take no exception, and sat down at the same table with him.

The crowd at once turned again to its occupations, though many curious glances were cast over toward the Man in Velvet.

Jack Dashaway was a "citizen" of influence in Danger Divide, though not always for good. He was a lion in strength and pluck, generous to a fault, a gold digger, a sport, dangerous when drinking, and a desperate hand with revolver or bowie knife, both of which he was too ready to use.

He had not only a record as a killer, but as one who always took the side of the under dog in the fight, when it was not his fight with the under dog.

He had, to the surprise of all, backed down from trouble with the stranger; but was it not a foreboding of future trouble? many wondered.

He had not liked the stranger's desire to be alone over in the corner, and to see him smoke a cigar, when a corn-cob or briar pipe was the limit in Gambler's Eden; all that had angered him.

But, apparently, he had realized that he had made a mistake, and the courteous treatment by the man he had insulted had caused him to at once seek his friendship.

Was it to be treacherous, in the end?

Many thought so.

Seated by the stranger, both of them had watched the actions of the crowd with apparent interest, but one who just then entered had suddenly turned their eyes upon him.

It was a youth, almost a boy, for he scarcely looked eighteen, though he might be several years older. He was well built, slender, wiry, quick in movement, and had the air of one who was a stranger to fear.

His face, particularly, rivited the stranger's attention, it was so refined, intelligent, handsome, yet full of indomitable courage.

There was a certain dare-devil look about him, a free-and-easy manner, that was very bold for a youngster and in such company.

He was dressed in black pants, top boots, a blue woolen shirt, black scarf tied in sailor knot in front, and a slouch hat.

About his slender waist was a Mexican sash, and the belt beneath held a pair of revolvers and a long-bladed knife of unique design.

"Who is he?" asked the Man in Velvet, of his new-made friend, the camp bravo.

"Now, pard, if you wants me to tell you what his real name is, whar he is from, and all that, I can't; but if you wants to know him as we knows him I kin say that he is ther durndest young tough in these mines, sharp as a needle, cute as a gal in talk, clever with his fists, his guns, thet queer knife he wears, and mighty fly with keerds."

"He seems to have quite a record."

"He has, and he deserves it. Why, I has seen him lose a clean thousand and never change his face; I has seen him win as much more, and kill the man he won it from because he said he had cheated, then send the winnings home to ther dead man's mother, and pay all expenses of the burial."

"Then he has his ideas of honor, and a heart as well as a ready hand?"

"Oh, yes; only he's such a tough young one ter kill."

"Has he killed more than the man you spoke of just now?"

"Killed more than him? Why, pard, he hold's ther champion belt of Danger Divide for man killing."

"You surprise me."

"Why, he lays three over me."

"Three what?"

"Men."

"Ah! he has killed three more men than you have?"

"He has, and I'm no slouch when it comes to that, mister."

"Have you killed many men?"

Jack Dashaway looked a trifle hurt and reached for his pocket; but instead of a revolver he drew out a gold watch and said:

"I don't keep it for time, pard, but to keep the record on—the big hand points to eight now, but it has to come round to the little hand at twelve."

CHAPTER III.

THE FATAL WATCH.

William Fredericks was more and more interested in his newly found friend.

The last remark had taken his attention from the youth who had entered the saloon and made his way over to the centre of the room, as though he was looking for some one.

The gold watch which Jack Dashaway had taken from his pocket, the stranger observed, had a black dial, and two red hands, while the figures were white.

The small hand pointed directly to twelve, and the large one to eight.

The watch was of massive manufacture, and on the inside of the gold case, opposite to the strange dial, was some engraving, but this William Fredericks did not attempt to read.

"That means you have killed eight men, does it?"

"It means just that."

"You look rough, tough, I may say, in a measure, and your actions toward me awhile since gave me the idea that you were a desperado of the first kind."

Jack Dashaway did not speak or flinch under this opinion of the stranger, who coolly continued:

"But, when I came to take a better look at you, I changed my opinion, and I do not believe you are the hard customer you wish to appear."

"Is that square?"

"It is, of a surety. Deceived in you by my first glance, I do not now believe you would take a human life without just cause, and—"

The stranger paused, for he saw the bosom of the man heaving convulsively, and his throat was working as though he was choking.

Then, too, in the dark, deep-set eyes were tears!

There was no mistaking them; they were tears, and in the eyes of a so-called desperado!

For a moment the man could not speak; but, at last, in a low, tremulous voice he said, as he held out his hand:

"Pard, you are the only man who ever read my heart. Two women did, my mother and—" again he choked up, but only for an instant, and then continued:

"One other—they were all."

"Pard William Fredericks, for so you called yourself, I am your friend through life."

He had suddenly seemed to forget

that he always had spoken in border dialect, the quaint language one drops into on the frontier, for he spoke now as a man who had seen far better days in the long ago.

"We will be friends, certainly, for I know no one in Danger Divide," said the stranger.

"You are lucky, for there are few here to know with honor in the acquaintance."

"But, you asked me if I had killed eight men?"

"Yes, I asked that in earnest."

"I have, eight that I count; but there are others whom I do not count—that is, they are not registered on the black dial of this watch, with its red hands and white lettering."

"What is the difference, so long as you have killed them, whether they are registered on the dial of what seems to be a fatal watch, or not?" asked the Man in Velvet, more than ever interested in the remarkable man he had so strangely met.

"Pard, I'll show you what I never allowed any man to look upon. I trust you, and I read in your face honesty, squareness of purpose, a noble nature, and—" after a pause he added:

"The very Devil in Hades if you are aroused, but one who sticks to the right."

"You are very kind to thus read my character," said the stranger, with a smile.

"I have made no mistake, and I'll back my words with my gun," was the reckless reply.

But, quickly, his manner changed again, and his voice softened as he went on to say:

"You ask me a question about what the dial of my watch tells."

"Yes."

"I will tell you—no, I do not intend to tire you with a story, for it would take too long. It is a story of a broken chord, a crushed life. This that I will show you will tell the story, and words can do no more."

"See here!"

He opened as he spoke the back of his watch, and revealed a curl of golden hair, tied with a narrow black ribbon.

Upon the inside cover of the back of the watch was a miniature painting of a beautiful face!

It was a likeness of a girl of twenty, with rare, true, womanly beauty, eyes wonderfully expressive, and a fascination that fairly riveted the gaze of the stranger.

Even in the light of the border saloon he discerned the beauty and unconsciously uttered the words:

"How lovely!—a woman to worship!"

The deep tone now of Jack Dashaway fairly startled him, so intense was the utterance.

"Yes, a woman to love, to worship, and to avenge!"

"Stranger, I am avenging her!"

CHAPTER IV.

A STRANGE COMPACT.

William Fredericks looked fixedly at the man who uttered the words so fiercely; he beheld intensity of feeling beneath the rough garb and tough appearance of Jack Dashaway.

A closer look showed that the man really was neat in his attire; his hair and beard, though worn long, were well cared for, and his face was a strikingly strong one if analyzed.

It was only in his assumed character that he appeared rough, uncouth, and desperate, and that it was assumed for

a purpose the stranger was now convinced.

"Sometimes, pard," he continued, after a long pause, in which both had been deeply meditating, "I am a fool, for I drink to drown remembrance. Then I do things I am ashamed of afterward, for I mean not to go wrong."

"You see, I cannot do as you do, and let the vile stuff alone."

"You can if you so wish."

"How can I?"

"Just make up your mind to let it alone, to take water instead of rum, for you have will enough to do so."

"Think so?"

"I know so."

"See here, will you do me a favor?"

"Certainly, if I can."

"Watch me closely."

"I will."

"And advise me when you see me about to take a drink."

"I will be glad to, but by some act or signal, for it comes with bad grace for one man to interfere with another at such a time."

"You did when I went to smoke awhile ago."

"That was different, for you had snatched my cigar from my mouth and insulted me."

"I have made amends, though, sir."

"Completely so."

"Then keep your word and do not let me take a drink."

"I will try."

"No, you have said you would."

"If I can."

"Will you do as I request?"

"Yes."

"Then shoot the glass out of my hand!"

"What?"

"Shiver the glass with your bullet as I raise it to my lips."

"Rather a severe hint to let it alone."

"No, I require it."

The stranger shook his head.

"You have promised to do as I asked?"

"Yes, but—"

"I shall hold you to your word, for once I am thus admonished, I will never drink rum again."

"It is almost worth the trial, then."

"It is! it is!"

"Suppose I cut a finger off with my bullet, or shatter your hand, for it is taking big chances to fire at a glass thus held."

"You can do it; but, if you do chip off a finger, I forgive you now!"

"Jack Dashaway, I will do as you ask. I will shatter the glass in your hand, if, in my presence you attempt to drink liquor, even though I cut off a finger or shiver a bone with my bullet," said the stranger, in his determined way.

"Shake!"

The miner held out his hand, and the Quick Shot Sport grasped it firmly, to bind the remarkable compact between them.

Just then the eyes of all in the saloon were turned over to where the youth referred to had stopped. It was at a table where half a dozen men were engaged in a game of poker for large stakes.

The loud voice of the boy had brought the eyes of all upon him, and his words fixed their attention completely.

"It is the boy breaking out, as he sometimes does," explained the miner, quietly.

"What is the matter?"

"Don't know, but he's on the war-path."

"Been drinking?"

"No, he don't do that."

"What is his name?"

"They calls him Billy Brass."

"He has my first name, then; but there is some trouble brewing over there."

"Yes, there allus is whar Billy Brass chips in, and he's likely to make grave fruit yet before the fuss ends," and Jack Dashaway dropped back into the border way of speaking.

"You said that he had killed more than eight men?"

"He has. One would say he had a contract ter furnish stiff for a undertaker, for he's downed eleven thet I knows of, and maybe he'll reach his dozen ter-night ther way things looks."

"What does he kill them for?"

"Thet's a mystery, but he does one good thing."

"How is that?"

"He generally gits ther worst of ther desperado lot; but, then, they is the ones he runs with, so it's a case of dog eat dog."

"Or pup eat dog," drily said the stranger, a look of disgust on his face for the young tough.

"You is right, and that's good, for he's a pup, and a bad one ter bite when he shows his teeth."

"See thar, now! He's made a bold bluff, and at ther man who is known as Old Nick's Own. This time ther boy will go under, for he's tackled ther wust of 'em all," said Jack Dashaway, with some show of excitement.

CHAPTER V.

A BOY'S BOLD BLUFF.

The boy was one whose youth and appearance indicated that he would have been more fitted to civilization than to such wild scenes as he was a participant in there, in Danger Divide.

He had stamped on his face a refinement which wild deeds could not erase, but those about him saw only the young Satan in him and born desperado, as his acts had stamped him.

When he had entered the Gambler's Eden Saloon his manner of circling about among the crowded tables showed that he was looking for some particular person, beyond a doubt.

Those who knew him best became interested, for when Bill Brass was "looking for some one" it generally meant that he was on the warpath.

He had appeared before in just such a way, and the result had been a shooting match from some cause or other.

Now it had been over a game of cards, then over a refusal of the youth to drink with some drunken bully, then over a bold charge of having robbed his claim, when he was absent from it, and so on.

This time the youth, in his dare-devil way, had sauntered up to the table of the six poker players referred to.

They were a hard-looking lot, save two, and these two were known to be honest, hard-working miners.

Men present had wondered why the two had been inveigled into a game with four well-known "terrors," one of whom was called Old Nick's Own, and richly deserved the title.

And it was upon this very man that the boy had "jumped" this time.

After watching the game for awhile, he had said, in a loud voice, addressing one of the hard-working miners:

"Lem Sutton, you is a fool to play keerds with sich a man as ther Devil's pet cub, thar."

This bold fling at Old Nick's Own it was that had brought every eye upon the lad.

But, he did not flinch under the ordeal.

He stood his ground, while Lem Sutton said, in an apologetic tone:

"The boys wanted us to play, Billy, and we obliged them."

"You are about as obliging a pair of fools as I knows, for ther gang is jist rakin' in yer dust, right along."

"And I intends ter, as long as luck comes my way," said Nick's Own, with a glare at the youth.

"You see, luck's against us to-night, Billy," the other miner remarked.

"Yes, we don't seem to have luck," Lem Sutton added.

"Well, without saying anything thet I think, I'll jist bet a clean one hundred on ther outside, thet I kin take your hand, Lem Sutton, or yours, Bob Bemis, and run ther game out a winner."

"Dare yer to try me, ef I pays yer losses thus far, and shares, if I win."

This bold offer was an astounding one. All present were surprised and interested in it, even more than in their own games.

The stranger, Fredericks, heard it, and it certainly carried out what Jack Dashaway had said of the boy.

"Let us get a closer look," said the stranger sport, and with Dashaway he neared the table.

Both the miners, Bob Bemis and Lem Sutton, had appeared glad to get out of the game, not so much from the youth's generous offer, but from a desire to drop out without trouble to themselves, for they were aware that they were being cheated, and yet knew the men too well who had inveigled them into the game to stop play as long as they were known to have money in their pockets.

"I will give up my hand to you, Billy Brass," said Lem Sutton.

"But I pay, what I've lost, and if you win you keep it."

"I'll draw out with my pard," added Bob Bemis, timidly.

"No yer don't! Thet boy can't take ther place of two men, though he does put on ther airs of one man at times," cried Nick's Own, and all the knowing ones scented trouble.

"Thar's blood on the moon," muttered Jack Dashaway to the stranger, the latter, however, making no reply.

"You remain in the game, Bob Bemis, and I'll see thet it goes squar; or if it does down us ther deal's a fair one," remarked Billy, paying no attention to what Nick's Own had said.

"You will, will yer, kid?"

"Yes, Nick, so don't you and yer keerd sharps let me ketch yer cheatin'."

Nick's Own laughed loudly at this, and his companions took the cue and joined in.

But the laughter was far from being natural.

"See thet we don't ketch you at ther light-fingered games yer played East, and thet sent yer out here ter keep out of jail, leetle feller," sneered the desperado.

"If you does ketch me cheating shoot me, and I'll do as much for you ef I ketches you," was the fearless and startling reply of Billy Brass, and it was followed by applause and laughter that Nick's Own did not half like.

CHAPTER VI.

A DANGEROUS GAME.

Billy Brass slipped into the seat vacated by Sutton, and the crowd began to gather closer.

All felt that when both Nick's Own and Billy Brass were in a game, it would be an interesting one and a dangerous one, too.

The two had never shown a regard for each other, and a game of cards was a dangerous commencement of a better acquaintance.

Billy was as utterly indifferent as one could be. The reckless, wicked look in his eye had simply increased.

He took up the cards laid down by Lem Sutton and said in his cheeky way:

"I don't wonder a leetle bit, Sutton, at yer bad luck, when they deals yer sich hands as these. But, I'll git better keerds, see if I don't."

"Yer will ef they come your way, kid; yer won't if they don't," growled Nick's Own.

"I'll see thet ther deal is squar and take my chances, as I allus does," came the cool reply.

"Don't make a bad break, Billy Brass, when I'm in ther game with yer."

"Ef it comes to a scrap, Nick, I'll fight Satan with fire."

The crowd laughed, and Nick's Own joined in the laugh; but it was dangerous laughter.

"Does yer know ther stakes run big fer leetle boys ter fool with?" inquired Nick's Own, with a sneer.

"Don't git funny and gay, Nick, but start ther game, for I'm in it fer all you kin squander, if yer does steal instead of work fer what yer gits."

The crowd shrank back. All expected to see an outbreak at this.

But Nick's Own seemed not to have caught the insulting words.

Those gathered about knew that Billy Brass had come there, from some reason known only to himself, to have it out with Nick's Own.

The very manner of the big camp desperado was dangerous, for he had seldom allowed an insulting word to pass without a quick drawing of his revolver and a fatal shooting match.

But now, he said nothing, showed no anger.

The game began, and Bob Bemis held his hands against the table, they trembled so.

Lem Sutton stood at his back, his hands on his shoulders, as though to give him what sympathy and encouragement he dared.

With the hand of Lem as a starter, the youth lost, merely remarking:

"I calls no man, attempts no bluff, with doctored keerds. But it's my deal now."

"See thet you deals squar," growled Nick's Own.

"Jist shoot me if yer ketches me, as I will you, or any of yer gang thet I sees playin' ther crook."

The boy took up the cards, shuffled them while he whistled a tune softly, and then dealt.

But, suddenly, he threw three cards down upon the table.

"These cards are marked, and don't belong to ther pack. Jist count ther keerds and see if ther pack hain't complete without 'em."

All looked to see the result.

"Count the pack, Bob Bemis," the boy ordered.

Bob did so, and the pack was found complete without the three cards just thrown out!

"You see, they is bad company in good, like me in your gang, Old Nick. But ther mark on them three is plain—ther right-hand corner of each one has a spot on it—see!"

All saw.

"I admit they is marked and in ther pack; but I guess Bob Bemis kin tell about them, fer look at him," cried Old Nick's Own.

"No he can't, but you kin. Bob Bemis is only skeered at being in a tight fix, and don't know what I knows about them keerds."

"Then, too, he hain't won a game, and you has, Nick's Own; and even thet hain't all."

"Well, hain't you a gittin' a leetle too cheeky fer a kid?" asked Nick's Own, viciously.

"It's my way, and them as don't like it kin call me down," was the quick retort.

"I'll do it, too, afore this game ends."

"I'm willin'; but want ter see ef yer kin cheat Bob Bemis and me, now I is onter yer leetle skin game, Nick."

All were surprised at Nick's Own, that he had not yet resented the boy's words and manner; but, there he sat, smoking his pipe and seemingly more anxious to play cards than to fight just then.

"Jist wait! Nick will break out in spots afore long," said one man.

"He'll find thet kid on deck when he does," said another.

The game went on. The boy played with skill, but seemingly with utter recklessness.

From time to time he bluffed and won largely, and even Bob Bemis began to take heart, though he knew that the end was not yet.

"Have you got back what they cheated you out of, you and Lem Sutton, Bob Bemis?" asked the boy.

"I won't say that I was cheated, Billy Brass; but I have got back all that we lost," was the timid reply.

"All right, then; draw out."

"Thank you; I will, for I—"

"No you don't, Bob Bemis! You can't draw out when winnin', as you and thet kid has been doin'," cried Nick's Own.

Bob Bemis hesitated and turned pale.

"Oh, yes, yer kin, Bob Bemis, for I don't draw out. I plays on, and you bet these pilgrims don't cheat me," said the boy.

Bob Bemis rose, but was instantly covered by Nick's leveled revolver.

"Sit down!" he commanded.

Bemis dropped in his seat.

"I take his hand and all responsibility, Nick," cried the boy, and he added: "Rob me now, if yer kin."

"He plays on, I says!" yelled Nick's Own.

On the instant the boy brought his hand from under the table, and his revolver covered Nick's Own.

"Now, lower that gun, Nick!" came the decided command.

Nick was fairly caught. He had not seemed to think the boy would dare draw on him.

But the boy did cover him, and looked the desperado squarely in the eye along the sights of his gun.

Then, suddenly, the three pards of Nick's Own leveled guns full at Billy Brass.

CHAPTER VII.

THE STRANGER SPORT HAS HIS SAY.

The climax had come, and the youth, though covering Nick's Own with his revolver, and who in turn covered Bob Bemis, found three other weapons leveled at him.

But the boy did not flinch; on the contrary, he smiled and said, in his reckless way:

"It's a three-cornered game, pards, but you jist bet if them fellers' guns goes off and gits me, mine goes, too, and sounds the crack of doom fer you, Nick, though maybe you'll git poor Bob Bemis. It's yur play, gents."

But the three companions of Nick's Own didn't "play," for just then the Stranger Sport chipped in, or rather arose and uttered the opening words of this story, addressed to Jack Dashaway.

"Say, pard," returned Jack, earnestly, "don't you go and make a mistake. Thet kid has been covered before, and it was the other man that turned up his toes."

"But, there are four to one against him!" urged the Man in Velvet.

"Yes, but take my advice, for if ther kid kills Nick, and his pards kill ther kid, thar will be jist two disturbin' elements out of this camp thet will make it a sweeter place for others ter live in."

"You talk wisely, Friend Dashaway, but my sympathies always go out to the under dog in the fight, and the odds against the boy are too great, so I'll jist have my little say."

"You is a stranger here, you knows."

"Then perhaps the people will know me better."

"Go in; I'm at your back, pard, every time!"

"No, I wish you to be one I can call upon secretly, not publicly, for you are a man to trust, and I will jist whisper in your ear that I shall need here jist such a friend as you are, though to outward appearances we are foes."

The man looked the Stranger Sport in the eyes, and said, slowly:

"I believe I understand. I recall a face I have seen before."

The stranger made no reply, but stepped quickly forward, pushing the men right and left as he did so. The crowd had cleared a space before the pointed revolvers.

No one was in range of the boy's revolver, leveled at Nick's Own, and an open lane was behind Bob Bemis, upon whom the weapon of the desperado was turned.

Then, too, another empty space was before the revolvers leveled at the boy by the desperado's three pards.

Into this space the Stranger Sport stepped, and without showing a weapon, said with a smile, but with a voice that was warningly distinct:

"Where I came from, gentlemen, none but cowards would jump four to one upon a boy. Lift your weapons, and quickly, or I kill the man who refuses or pulls trigger."

The deep-drawn sigh that came from the crowd showed the intensity of feeling from all.

The three men addressed gazed away from the boy upon the Stranger Sport.

A man with no weapon visible to thus address them seemed preposterous; and a stranger, too!

They glanced at their leader, but he just then had a contract on his hands that was worrying him greatly, for, not considering Bob Bemis in the affair now, he yet covered him, while the boy had him under his deadly aim.

"Did you hear me?"

Like a bugle came the warning from the Stranger Sport's lips, and at the same moment, in a way no one just saw how, two revolvers were in his hands, and were turned upon the three men.

At once their weapons were lowered; they no longer covered the boy.

What would the Man in Velvet do now? all wondered.

He did not leave them in suspense.

"Now, young pard, honors are even, so you and that fellow can settle it between you, but if others take a hand in, I shall do the same," and he glanced at the three men he had cowed into obedience.

The boy laughed and replied:

"Thank you, Stranger Pard; but I've got the trumps, for I hold my gun on Old Nick."

"But I takes no advantage, so jist arrange for him and me to have it out dead square. That's all I asks."

"That is fair. You are a brave young fellow; but, if you don't wish to meet him you need not," said the sport.

"But I wants ter; I'm dead stuck on it," was the reckless reply.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CHALLENGE.

At these words of Billy Brass the crowd gave vent to their pent-up feelings in a loud cheer.

Every man of them admired such pluck immensely.

The bold act of the stranger had been a surprise, and he, too, won instant admiration by his words and act.

As Billy Brass so promptly challenged the desperado to meet him, the latter had nothing else to do than accept. Did he refuse, Danger Divide would have become too hot for his dwelling place; he could only hold his own by being "game."

Lowering his weapon, Nick said, in his growling way:

"I'd a heap rather spank yer, leetle feller; but ef yer wants ter play with loaded weepens, why I'll obleege yer."

"All right; I'll ask you, Jack Dashaway, ter be my second, as I doesn't wish ter drag thet stranger inter any more trouble than he has already got inter, and I appreciates his makin' them three coyotes step out of ther game."

"Now, seein' as my winnings may be needed fer future reference, I'll jist rake 'em in 'fore they gits mixed up in other people's pockets."

With this the youth gathered up his money, Bob Bemis taking heart at this to grab his and his partner's, which the boy had won back for them, and had left on the table.

"Go slow thar, but I has a claim fer a leetle of thet gold, too," called out Old Nick.

"You has fer yer last stake, and thar it lies, yours and them coyotes', too; it's yours and theirs, I admit. I hain't no thief, if I is bad all round. But, jist now, Nick's Own, it's a game o' lead or steel atween us, I hain't particular which," said the boy, having pocketed his share of the money.

Bob Bemis timidly drew back from the table with Lem Sutton, as soon as they got their money, and Nick's Own and his three pards were not long in pocketing the little they had left on the board.

"Well, young feller, as yer asked me, I sarves yer," spoke Jack Dashaway, as Billy Brass turned to him.

The Stranger Sport had simply stepped back into the crowd, but Nick's Own had his eye upon him, as also had his three comrades, and there was some low whispering between them.

"You must keep your eye on those men, sir," warned a miner standing by the side of the Man in Velvet.

"Thank you, sir, I will."

"They mean you dirt."

"I do not doubt it."

"You made a bold stand for a stranger, not only with Jack Dashaway, but with Nick's Own and his gang."

"It was demanded of me by a sense of duty, as I regarded it."

"Well, you made friends by it, and I hope we'll get better acquainted."

"I hope so, for I have no acquaintances here."

"You need not be afraid of Jack Dashaway playing snake, for he's open in what he does, if he is a bad one when he's on the rampage. We all know where to find him."

The Stranger Sport was pleased to hear this report of his new-found friend, and from one who appeared to be one of the square men of Danger Divide.

But he did not say anything. His eyes were turned upon Billy Brass, who was speaking.

"Now, Jack," said the boy, "settle it with Nick's Own whether he wishes me to kill him with bullet or knife, for it's all the same to me."

Nick's Own saw his chance in an instant, and called out:

"Then I says knives, young bantam."

"Steel goes," was the reckless reply of the young scapegrace.

CHAPTER IX.

A DUEL IN DANGER DIVIDE.

A frown came over the handsome face of the Stranger Sport when it was decided that the duel should be with knives instead of with revolvers, which he considered would equalize the affair.

He glanced at the large, strong man, who was built for strength and endurance, while his movements were quick and his eye sharp and restless.

The youth was wiry in form, slender, and seemed no match for the man physically; hence the Man in Velvet was surprised when Billy had so recklessly agreed that knives should be the weapons used.

"The boy is all right, never fear!" was said in a whisper to the Stranger Sport, and he turned, to see Jack Dashaway passing him.

It relieved his mind greatly; that was certain; yet it was not sufficient to prevent him from carrying out his intention, for, as the crowd was clearing a space for the combatants, he said:

"One moment, sir."

The words were addressed to Nick's Own, who was seated at a table sharpening his bowie on his bootleg, as though to intimidate his boy antagonist.

"Waal, what do you want?" growled the desperado.

"I wish to say that where I came from a man who would fight a duel with a boy is rightly looked upon as a coward, and as I object to seeing such an unequal match, I say now that I will take the place of that youth, and meet you."

The desperado looked up with a scowl, while every eye in the room was upon the Man in Velvet.

The answer came:

"Say, fer a stranger in Danger Divide, you chip in pretty fresh. I advises you to keep quiet, or you'll git a contract on yer hands yer won't be able ter fill."

"I only wish now to take that contract, of killing you, off of that boy's hands; then if you have any pards who have other contracts to suggest, I am ready to accommodate them," was the calm response.

"I'll tend ter yer when I've put my hand on thet boy."

"Then you persist in your cowardly intention to fight him?"

"I does."

"Well, I, for one—"

"Say, mister, it's mighty good in you ter want ter fight my battles for me, but I'm able ter look arter my own self, though I thanks you most kindly, I jest does. But jest see ef I don't make thet

no-good tough find out he's bit off more than he kin chew."

"But this unequal fight should not be allowed," persisted the stranger, turning to the crowd.

"Well, it shall be, Pard Sport, fer out here in Danger Divide any one who has not got ther sand ter fight his own battles don't stay here. That's the law here. Now I is ready, Jack," and with a courtly salute to the Stranger Sport the boy turned toward Dashaway.

The Man in Velvet said no more, but he stepped forward in the first line of witnesses, and if he did not intend to see fair play, his flashing eyes belied him.

The camp desperado had his three companions at his back, and called out that he was ready for the fight.

He had stripped off his coat, rolled up the sleeve of his right arm, and had his ugly looking bowie knife tightly grasped in his hand.

The youth had simply made no preparations for a duel on which his life depended, save taking his revolvers out of his belt. Then a knife was lifted from its sheath, which when drawn showed in a very dangerous light. It was of Oriental manufacture, very long and sharp pointed, though broad near the hilt.

"I'm ready, Nick's Own, and if you hasn't said yer prayers, you've missed it, fer I don't intend ter give yer time. I am in this game ter win ther jackpot, your life, which isn't worth much," and the youth laughed recklessly at his jest.

On the instant Nick's Own made a spring for Billy Brass, as if to take him off guard, but the boy eluded him with the agility of a squirrel, and as the big bulk went by that long blade skillfully slit his ear.

"That's ter see ef yer blood hain't black, Nick," taunted the little duelist.

A yell greeted the deft act, and the desperado grew livid, for he felt that he indeed had a dangerous job on his hands.

He wheeled on the very instant, and made another leap, of course expecting the boy to dodge; but the ruffian was taken wholly aback to have his knife caught on the guard of the youth's blade! and there was fine-tempered steel in the slender wrist of Billy Brass!

The desperado tried to free his knife from the guard, but he was pressed too hard.

Then he sprang backward, but the youth anticipated this, and sprang with him, still keeping the blades locked together.

The crowd was amazed, though they all knew that Billy Brass was a wonderful expert with a knife.

The Stranger Sport cried:

"Bravo! You handle a blade like an East Indian, my boy."

"Thank yer, stranger! I studied ther art fer jist sich fun as this," was the prompt reply.

"Fun!" and in a life and death struggle? Even that was not what the rough camp denizens could call fun.

Then the blades parted, and the antagonists drew apart for a new clash.

All realized that the two were well matched.

Nick's confessed skill and that of his young antagonist made it more like a duel with swords than with knives.

After some fierce play of thrust and parry, in which sparks flew from the blades, Billy Brass began to give way.

A groan came from the crowd.

Nick's Own gained encouragement, and made a leap, intending to crush the boy beneath his greater weight.

It was a fatal move. The little body

of the boy bowed, bent, swayed, and with an up-thrust of astonishing quickness the duel ended.

The long blade was driven into the broad breast, quite through the body!

CHAPTER X.

UTAH JOE'S SECRET.

Billy Brass sprang back, and by the act withdrew his blade, and Nick's Own dropped heavily upon the floor—a dead man.

The crowd was dazed by the unexpected termination of the duel; not a word was uttered.

Billy was the first to speak.

"Give me my guns, Jack Dashaway, fer I may need 'em, as there may be somebody as wants ter take this up ag'in' me."

Jack Dashaway handed over the revolvers, and the youth quickly replaced them in his belt.

"You has done the best deed o' yer life, young feller, though yer got my game," said Jack.

"How is thet, Jack?"

"He were game of mine I hed laid out ter tackle some day."

"Sorry I disappointed yer, Jack, but I come in this saloon ter-night purpose ter kill Nick's Own."

The Man in Velvet heard the remark and said:

"Let me congratulate you upon the manner in which you handle a knife."

"You can take care of yourself anywhere, I see, now."

"It's what I aims ter do, Stranger Sport," and with a nod the youth walked out of the saloon, but turned at the door, and glanced over the crowd, as though to give a chance for a challenge if any was intended.

But, none was given, and the youth disappeared.

The three comrades of the dead camp terror had seemed bewildered. They could not believe Nick's Own to really be dead. They felt for his pulse, put their ears over his heart and listened to see if its beating was stilled forever.

At last they were convinced, and, borrowing a stretcher from Piggy, the bartender, they placed the body upon it, and, aided by another man, who volunteered his services, left the saloon with their ghastly burden.

Straight to their mountain cabin, a mile away, they bore the dead tough, and when they got there the number of attendants had increased from four to a dozen.

The lamps were lighted in the cabin and the body was decently placed upon a bench, while the living gathered around the fire to discuss the events of the night.

"Pards, did yer hear what thet boy told Jack Dashaway ter-night?" asked Utah Joe, one of the three who had been with Nick's Own in the game of cards.

"What did he say, Joe?" asked another.

"Thet he hed come to thet saloon on purpose ter kill Nick."

"Well, he done it. That kid is a devil with a knife."

"Yes, pards, he's a devil in any game he plays," opined Joe.

"It was a square, stand-up fight, Joe."

"It were that, but thar's one thing on my mind."

"Well, Joe, what is it?" was asked.

Joe turned to one and then the other of his companions, who were occupants of the cabin with Nick's Own and himself, and answered:

"See here, Utah Jim, and you, too,

Utah John, has yer forgot thet that same kid hev kilt folks afore ter-night?"

"Oh, yes; he's a man killer, and no mistake; but, what has we ter kick ag'in', if he kilt Nick's Own in a square fight?" asked Jim.

"Does yer remember who t'others was whose chips he has cashed in?" asked Joe.

"Yes, thar was Devil Dan, Chips, Black Ben, Boston Bill, and—"

The man hesitated, as though at a loss to remember the names of all whom the youth was known to have killed, and then Utah Joe said:

"That's right; call 'em off, and keep a calling, for there is a number of 'em."

"Thar sartinly is," assented Utah Jim.

"Oh, yes, but thet hain't all."

"No, Joe, thar's more."

"Well, what I wants yer ter consider, pards, is ther fact thet each man thet Billy Brass hes kilt in Danger Divide hes been one of our own gang."

CHAPTER XI.

A DOOMED TRIO.

Utah Joe had announced a very important and startling fact; and then added:

"Now, pards, I wants ter ask yer is this a accident?"

"It looks ter me on purpose," responded one.

"I would say thet, too," from another.

"We can't go back on ther fact, fer it hes been our own pards thet he hes gone fer."

"Maybe it's only our pards thet has provoked him," one man suggested.

"They has not done that, as far as I know. Nick's Own did not do it last night, thet are sartin."

So the comments ran, until Utah Joe again spoke:

"Pards, it hes been done fer a purpose; I see it all clear enough now, and it's my opine that ther kid hes taken ther contract ter down our band. More'n that: Ther way he goes about it means thet he knows every one of us."

"Utah Joe knows what he are talking about," averred Utah Jim.

"I'm thinking the same way," chimed in Utah John.

"Now, pards, in ther place of Nick, I shall act until ther cap'n says who is ter step inter our dead pard's shoes," announced Joe.

This was agreed to by all; then Joe continued:

"Pards, I has something more ter say."

All were now keenly attentive.

"Now I doesn't say thet Jack Dashaway and ther kid is pards, but it do look thet way, though they haven't been over-friendly afore ter-night."

"Then yer believes ther boy and him is pards?"

"I don't say they is, but I does say thet if yer'll keep count of ther men that Jack Dashaway has put under ground, yer'll see thet each one of 'em was also members of our gang."

Here was another startler, and each man of them showed his surprise and alarm.

"Is thet so, Joe?" asked one.

"Sartin sure," Joe responded. "We hed over thirty members a year ago."

"We hed."

"We hes now jist one dozen, countin' ther cap'n."

"True again."

"Of course, some of 'em has dropped out from other causes, but yer'll find thet between ther kid and Jack Dashaway most of 'em has tarning ther toes up at their call."

This was conclusive; the men could have not a shadow of doubt.

Utah Joe went on to say:

"Now, pards, them two is friends, though they don't appear ter be—ther kid and Jack Dashaway, I mean. And more yet: Thet stranger as backed down Jack Dashaway—I suspects him."

"What about him?"

"He chipped in ag'in' Nick and us ter-night, done us out of a big pile of money we hed cleaned Lem Sutton and Bob Bemis out of, and called us down pretty fine."

"Indeed he did."

"Well, ef he hain't come ter stand in ther game with ther kid and Jack Dashaway, jist set me down as a liar, and all I say is thet them three hes got ter pass in ther chips mighty soon, or we'll be downed, every man of us."

"Pard Joe, I believes you is right. Them three must be got rid of."

And this decision met with general approval.

CHAPTER XII.

THE STRANGER SPORT'S SECOND SHOT.

When the body of Nick's Own had been taken away from the Gambler's Eden Saloon, Jack Dashaway sat down to a game of cards, and from the first became a heavy winner.

The man seemed anxious to drown thought by excitement, and though he played with apparent indifference as to consequences, he won steadily.

At last he said:

"Say, pards, I'm in luck to-night, and I kinder feel as though it would stick by me, jist because I don't care if I lose; but I happens ter know you three boys hain't rich, and losses comes heavy on you, so I draws out of ther game right here; and more—I invites yer ter take a drink with me, for I is goin' ter my cabin."

The three men were surprised. They were good fellows, as the word goes, but not able to lose what they had, for they were hard-working men, who seldom spent money in the saloon or gambled.

They were, therefore, only too glad to get out of a bad scrape, and accepted the invitation of Jack Dashaway with pleasure.

Up to the bar walked the four men, and, standing on the right of the others, Jack Dashaway leant his elbow upon the bar and called out:

"Denominate yer pizen, gents, and don't be afraid, for I pays ther bills."

But there was one in the crowded saloon who had his eye upon them. It was the Stranger Sport—the Man in Velvet.

He had been seated apart from the crowd, alone at a table, and seemed to enjoy looking at the stirring scene the Gambler's Eden always presented at midnight.

He had watched Jack Dashaway gambling and winning.

Seated but a short distance from them, he had heard what Jack Dashaway had said, and the invitation he had extended.

He looked on as the men took their places at the bar.

"Is he going to break his pledge to me?" he muttered.

Then, as he saw the miner take the bottle from the hand of the man nearest him, and pour out a drink:

"I must keep my promise. It will create a scene, but I shall do it," was his quick decision.

At that moment the door opened and Billy Brass, who had disappeared from the Eden a half hour before, re-entered the saloon.

He uttered a quick cry at what he saw—the Stranger Sport with revolver leveled, apparently at Jack Dashaway!

But, he was too late, for there came a flash, a report, and a ring of glass shattered to atoms.

The bullet of the stranger had shivered the glass held in the hand of Jack Dashaway, as it was touching his lips!

Jack started back at the sudden crash, the glass flying to pieces in his hand, while the liquor spattered into his face.

Instantly came to mind his compact with the Stranger Sport—the Man in Velvet—the Marvelous Quick Shot—the Friend to Tie To—who had coolly replaced his revolver and was quietly smoking a cigar, apparently the most indifferent man in the room.

He had not changed his position at the table, and met the looks bent upon him by the astonished crowd with calm unconcern.

Then all eyes turned upon Jack Dashaway. What would he do? How would he take this second pistol play of the stranger?

Realizing fully the situation, the miner at once spoke out:

"Stranger, I have not altered my opinion that you are the deadliest shot I ever saw handle a gun. Some day you and I will be quits."

The unknown bowed in response, and Jack, turning to the bartender, said:

"Piggy, a glass of water this time for me, please. The Stranger Sport, I see, objects to my taking anything stronger, and I yield to his wishes. Gents, all, come up and jine me, fer it's my treat."

The crowd accepted with alacrity—all save one, and he called out:

"I don't drink with no coward as is afeerd of this feller here," and he walked over to where the stranger sat and drew his hand back, to strike the sport in the face.

The blow never reached its mark, for the fist of the stranger shot out from the shoulder, and the assailant went flying backward and downward, falling heavily upon the floor. The wholly amazed crowd gave a yell of delight—the more delighted in that the fellow was known as Knock Out Kit, the acknowledged strong man and pugilist of the camps for a hundred miles around.

Knock Out Kit was knocked out at last.

CHAPTER XIII.

AJAX AGAINST HERCULES.

The champion pugilist of the camps, Knock Out Kit, arose to his feet in a dazed condition, but soon set his gaze upon the Stranger Sport, toward whom both Jack Dashaway and Billy Brass had somehow edged their way.

"Say, what did yer hit me with?" demanded the Camp Cock-of-the-Walk.

"My fist."

"Yer is a howlin' liar, 'cause—"

The revolver of the Man in Velvet covered the bully, and sharp came the words:

"Retract that insult quick, or I drive the lie down your throat with a bullet!"

The crowd was becoming wild with excitement, but instantly, at the words of the stranger, the pugilist raised his hand and called out:

"I hain't got no gun!"

"Obey me and retract that insult, gun or no gun!"

"If I does will yer meet me in a knock-out fight?"

"Yes, anyway you please."

A wild yell greeted this prompt acceptance.

"Then I asks yer pardon; but, what in thunder did yer hit me with?"

"My fist only."

"Yer didn't give me no show."

"I deal with all mad brutes alike," was the reply.

"You calls me a brute?"

"Why not?"

"Then I say it's you who has got ter apologize."

"I always consider my words, so never retract those I utter to a coward; but I am responsible for them."

"Yer knows I don't carry no guns."

"I know nothing about you, save what you have shown yourself to be."

"But, yer won't fight?"

"Oh, yes, I will."

"As I fights?"

"In any way, place, or time you see fit."

Again a yell from the crowd.

The man was quite nonplussed, but said:

"I guess yer don't know me, ter say that."

"Come, what do you wish?"

"A fight, in course."

"All right! Name your weapons."

"These," and he held up two fists as large as two sledge hammers.

The unknown quickly took off his coat and hat, placing them behind him on the table at which he had been seated, and Jack Dashaway moved to one side, Billy Brass to the other, as though to protect them.

This act of the Stranger Sport revealed his graceful form to perfection, and the bully, three inches taller and fifty pounds heavier in weight, threw off his coat with a proud smile at the contrast he would show.

All saw it, and several called out:

"Don't fight him, Stranger Pard, for he's a giant!"

"You hain't no match for him, stranger, if yer did git in a knockout blow when he wasn't looking fer it."

"You got even in ther knock down, Pard Sport, so let it go at that."

But the stranger merely bowed and stood watching his huge adversary.

When he had removed his coat the stranger exposed no belt of arms about his waist; therefore his weapons must be in the inside pockets of his coat.

"They calls yer a sport, so does yer want ter put up any money on my lickin yer?" demanded Knock Out Kit.

"Oh, yes; I'll put up a hundred, and you cover it, and whichever loses the camps will be benefited, for it goes to every poor and sick miner who may need help."

A cheer greeted this generous proposal, but Knock Out Kit growled an angry consent, for he was fairly caught.

"Quit talking and name yer undertaker, fer my blows kills," warned the irate pugilist.

Just at that moment the proprietor of the tavern known as the House of Refuge entered the Gambler's Eden.

He was a man of influence in the camps—a quiet, energetic person for so wild a community, and one who commanded the respect of all, good and bad, the latter element being particularly afraid of him.

"Can I help you, sir, for you seem to be in some trouble, from what I hear. I will say now that I, with others, am getting tired of the way every stranger to our camps is pitched upon by certain men here who could be spared without loss to Danger Divide."

These words met with a hearty reception by about one-half of the crowd, who

felt that the camps were becoming too tough in every way.

Glancing at the landlord, the Stranger Sport replied, with a smile:

"That fellow has told me to select my undertaker, sir, and I would be glad to have you serve me, if you will."

"I'll be your second, sir, and see you decently buried if you should be killed, for I admit the chances are against you in a fight with that man."

"I am willing to take all chances, sir," replied the unknown.

CHAPTER XIV.

OVERMATCHED.

Landlord Brad Loyd looked with admiration upon the stranger.

"Poor fellow! He does not know the battering ram he has to meet; but he shall have fair play, I promise you," he said to a miner next to him.

Then, turning to the bully, he said:

"See here, Knock Out, I wish you to understand that I second this stranger, whom you have picked a quarrel with, and if you attempt anything unfair in your fight, I'll see to it that Danger Divide will be no place for you, if you value life."

"I don't like threats, Brad Loyd."

"Oh! get ready to fight, for I said I would meet you any way, and I will. I know how to deal with just such blow-hard bullies as you. I thank you, sir, for serving me," and the Stranger Sport stepped toward Kit.

"All ready," shouted Brad Loyd.

"I am."

"And I is."

"Time!"

At the word the big bruiser began to dance about in front of the Stranger Sport, his hands up, his head ducking, and adopting all the ways of a prize fighter.

"When you get tired of playing the monkey, and wish to fight, let me know, will you?" remarked the Stranger Sport impatiently.

"Take that, then!" yelled the bruiser, and he aimed a blow that would have felled an ox if it had struck him.

But the blow did not reach. The Unknown dodged it with easy agility, but even as he dodged he planted his fist so swiftly and hard in the face of the bully that he brought him to his knees. The blood burst from his nose, and the now infuriated man sprang to his feet, only to measure his length upon the floor from another terrible blow—this time upon the jaw.

The camp pugilist arose in a staggering way, and a number called out:

"Look out for him, sport!"

The advice was well meant, and it was needed, for, pretending to be dazed, the bully, still on his knees, made a sudden spring to grasp the sport in his arms, to close with him.

But, clear over his head leaped the stranger, and, wheeling with the quickness of a cat, he seized the man in his arms, raised him clear of the floor, and dashed him down with a force sickening to hear.

"I thank you, sir!" and, as though he knew there was no need to take a look at the bruiser, the Stranger Sport turned to put on his coat and hat.

The fight had ended too quickly for the crowd, yet ended it had, for Knock Out Kit was knocked out—was suffering from a dose of his own medicine, so often administered to others, greatly to their injury and disgust.

He lay unconscious upon the floor, bleeding from his nose and mouth, minus

two front teeth, and with both eyes disfigured.

Piggy, the barman, threw a pitcher of water in his face, and the bruiser yelled vigorously:

"Take him off, for God's sake! I've got enough!"

The crowd yelled, and Piggy said:

"This is your money, sir."

The stranger took the stakes he had won and, handing the money to Brad Loyd, said:

"You know best, sir, who need help in the camps; so please distribute this money where it will do the most good."

Raising his hat in acknowledgement of the cheer given him, the sport continued:

"Now, pard, set up drinks for the gentlemen all round, and a good square dose will help you, Knock Out Kit."

"I believe you, Pard Stranger, fer you kin knock harder than any mule kin kick."

"Piggy, run a tumbler over ther top fer me, while I drinks ther stranger gent's health."

The crowd laughed, and, still seated on the floor, his face a wreck, drenched by the water thrown on him, and the picture of despair, Knock Out Kit drank the full glass of liquor which the sport himself took from the bar and handed to him.

"That's the man we want here in Danger Divide," remarked a miner, and many agreed with him, and drank the very good health of the unknown visitor.

"Why, Jack Dashaway is drinking water!" cried a voice.

And so it was! Jack had taken hold of the bottle to pour out a drink, and join in the stranger's treat, but just then he had caught sight of the sport's action, his right hand slipping toward an inner pocket in his coat.

Well he knew what that meant, and dropping the bottle, he picked up the pitcher instead, and filled his glass with water!

"That was a lucky look fer me, Billy Brass, fer I'd hev hed another glass smashed in my hand, fer thet Stranger Sport were gittin' ready ter shoot."

"And, Billy Brass, let me tell yer right now, he hev broke me of drinking, for I don't down another glass o' liquor while I'm in ther mines. Jist watch me and see!"

"If yer keeps yer word, Jack, yer'll be a man. Ef yer breaks it, yer'll be what yer often has been, a brute," was the boy's bold comment.

CHAPTER XV.

THE RECOGNITION.

The Stranger Sport had certainly won the admiration of the people of Danger Divide. There was so much of the man of honor in all he had done that the crowd had been quite captured.

Brad Loyd, landlord of the House of Refuge, had not seen the stranger upon his arrival that night, having been away at the time hunting; but he had at once been informed of how his guest had taken the part of Billy Brass, and also of his having shot a cigar and glass of liquor out of the hand of Jack Dashaway. That was introduction to his confidence, and looking at the register—for Loyd kept a very good hotel, it was admitted by all—he read:

"William Frederick,

"Sport at Large,"

which only suggested that William Frederick was a strolling gambler.

When the landlord went into the Gambler's Eden and saw the situation there, he was greatly impressed by the newcomer's appearance.

"That's a man to tie to," he muttered, and then he went forward and offered his services, as has been seen.

After the crowd had accepted the stranger's treat, the latter raised his slouch hat courteously, and left the saloon.

He was followed by Brad Loyd, who found him seated on the broad piazza of the hotel, enjoying his cigar.

He was all alone, but kept his eye upon the landlord as he approached.

"Mr. Frederick, I was not at the tavern when you arrived, and so you did not get the quarters I wish you to have, for I have a spare room in my own cabin over yonder you can occupy."

"I thank you, landlord. I like my comfort when I can get it, and can put up with the worst when I have to; but I had a good supper and like your place."

"Let me thank you for being my second to-night in that little affair."

"Little affair? Why, man, that fellow is the strong man of these mines, and as quick as a panther; yet you handled him without effort, apparently."

"I have had my muscles hardened by just such work, and quickness of action has often saved my life."

"But, I'd like to ask you something about the people of Danger Divide."

"Anything you please."

"You see, I am here to stay for awhile, and wish to get along without trouble if I can."

"Going to, after your way of introducing yourself to-night, I'm thinking."

"I had to protect myself, you know."

"Oh, yes, you were right, as those who were wrong found out. Are you going to mine for gold, sir?"

"Only with pasteboard picks and shovels, landlord."

"Ah! that means you are a gambler?"

"Well, about that, I guess. I gamble for an end, play games to win certain stakes," was the significant reply.

"I guess you'll win. You are just the man to do so, my friend. I am yours to command."

"Thank you; but you do not know me yet."

"Suppose I say I do know you?"

"Well, landlord?"

"You have registered as William Frederick, Sport at Large."

"Yes; that's the sign on my door."

"I have a friend, or had one, when I was a soldier, five years ago, in the Fifth Cavalry, First Sergeant, Troop B, who had two-thirds of your name."

"Indeed?"

"Yes."

"It is quite a coincidence, landlord, though my name is not an uncommon one."

"His name was William Frederick Cody."

"Ah, yes; I have heard of the man. Scout, wasn't he?"

"He was Chief of Army Scouts, and was better known as Buffalo Bill."

"Oh, yes; I know him."

"And I will never forget him, for I'll tell you that, one day, when in action with the Indians, I was wounded and fell from my horse; he wheeled to the right about, dashed back to where I lay, stood at bay for a minute until he checked the leading Indians, and then, raising me in his arms as easily as you did Knock Out Kit to-night, he put me across his saddle, sprang up behind me, and rode on."

"The Indians shot his horse before

he had gone very far, but he caught on his feet, again stood at bay, and beat the reds back, when he threw me across his shoulder and ran like a deer until Captain Alf Taylor rode back with his troop and rescued us both."

"I see. He was lucky, as you were, also."

"I was lucky to be saved by Buffalo Bill, and he risked his life to do it, though he did not know me then from any other soldier."

"I left the army two years after, and drifted up here, where I am doing well, for I am a fairly rich man, and I tell you now that the face of Buffalo Bill is so indelibly stamped upon my heart and brain that I knew it the moment I saw you to-night, in spite of your disguise."

"You are William Frederick Cody!"

CHAPTER XVI.

BUFFALO BILL IN DISGUISE.

"You have recognized me, Brad Loyd?"

The Sport at Large rather asked the question than asserted it, as he bent his gaze upon the landlord of the House of Refuge.

"Yes, and of course you know me, for I am not so much changed in the five years since we met," and the landlord held out his hand.

Before grasping it the stranger said:

"Suppose I tell you that you are mistaken?"

"As well tell me that I am Buffalo Bill as that you are not."

"Why do you think I am the scout?" at bay against the Indians, with me lying

"In the first place, you cannot disguise your eyes. I saw them to-night as I remembered them when you stood injured wounded at your feet."

"They had that same look to-night when you seized Knock Out Kit in your arms and dashed him down upon the floor."

"Again, I know what Buffalo Bill's strength is, and we soldiers never knew a man who could equal it."

"Well?"

"For some reason you have cut off your long, thick, waving hair, and the change is remarkable in you."

"Well?"

"You have also shaved off your handsome moustache and imperial, and that changes your whole face, softens it wonderfully, and takes away the military air."

"Yes."

"The cause of all this must have been very important."

"Yet you say it has not wholly disguised me, for you still insist that I am Buffalo Bill?"

"You are Buffalo Bill to me."

The stranger was silent for a moment, and then said:

"My good pard, Brad Loyd, I will not deny my identity to you any longer; I am Buffalo Bill."

The hands of the two men came together in a warm grasp, and the landlord seemed overjoyed in meeting once more the one to whom he owed his life.

The stern, dignified landlord of the frontier inn was now as cheery as a boy.

"Well, Pard Bill, for I must call you so, I don't wish to meddle in your affairs, or to be curious, but you are here on some secret trail, or you would never have disguised yourself as you have; but I only wish to say that you must command me if I can serve you in any way."

"Thanks, Brad; that is just what I am going to do. You see, I came here a stranger in a strange land, for I do not

know this country, and I did not expect to meet any good pard whom I knew. I knew you at a glance to-night, yet did not wish to betray myself or make known my mission; but I will tell you now that you can aid me very much, for you doubtless know every man in these mines."

"Oh, yes, and little good of most of them."

"You knew the man who was killed to-night, Old Nick's Own?"

"Yes, and he was as bad as they make 'em, while I believe he runs a gang very much of his own stripe."

"That is just what he does, though he is not the chief."

"Ah! who is?"

"That I wish to find out. No eavesdroppers here?"

"No, say what you please."

"You know that coaches have been held up and robbed over these trails for two years, and in a most systematic and secret way."

"Yes; for an ugly fact, they have."

"They have always killed the driver of the robbed coach, or he has most mysteriously disappeared."

"True."

"Passengers have also been killed, or have disappeared in the same mysterious manner, so that no one was left to tell who was guilty of the red deeds."

"No, and no trace of the robbers could be found."

"That is just it; but, not only have male passengers disappeared, after these attacks, but females, too, and what has been their fate no one can find out, thus far."

"I know it, I know it, only too well."

"Now, it is reported up our way that Mormons are the outlaws who are doing these red deeds in this mysterious manner, especially as the women have been taken; but I do not believe it, Brad, and when I said so to General Sheridan, he told me to take the trail and find out. That is why I am here, for this place and the trails leading from here are the head center of all the crimes."

"Now you know why I am in Danger Divide and disguised as I am, for I am on this trail to win."

CHAPTER XVII.

A MYSTERY TO FATHOM.

Landlord Brad Loyd, the ex-soldier, listened to Buffalo Bill's explanation with exceeding interest.

"Now, Pard Bill, I understand all," Loyd answered, "and again I say I'm with you. Of course, you must have sure knowledge that Nick's Own was but a sub-leader of the gang, not the chief?"

"That was my impression; but I'll tell you what I know:

"On my way here I had, as fellow-passengers in the coach, from Pinnacle Heights stage station, a hundred miles from here, two apparently Eastern men. I was not deceived, however. I took them in for what they were, kept my eye on them, and when they made the break I was watching for, and ordered my hands up, I was so well prepared that I killed one and was not long in subduing the other."

"To my surprise the fellow I made a prisoner shouted to the driver:

"'He's kilt Jim and got me foul, Nat! Kill him or git!'"

"The driver took the advice and skipped!"

"I bound my prisoner, mounted the box, and drove back to Pinnacle Heights and reported. I searched my men, dead

and alive, and discovered that each one wore a silver ring with a red stone, and on the face of the stone was cut a number. Those two were 22 and 23.

"By mere accident I had observed that the stage driver wore the same style of ring, but did not see the number, for unless one looks very close the numbers are not visible.

"The station agent thanked me, for the coach carried a good sum of money, and said he would hold the prisoner for trial.

"The rogue, however, escaped that night, as we had to wait for another driver to come on and take the coach through, in place of the one who had skipped on the trail.

"I took the ring off the dead man's finger, and said nothing about it, but have it with me."

"Good!"

"Now, to-night I noticed that Old Nick's Own had a ring just like it, and I did manage to catch the number, which was silver set in the stone, instead of being cut in."

"What was the number?"

"Number Two."

"In silver?"

"Yes; and my idea is that the chief will have Number One, and it will be in gold."

"You certainly have a wonderful way of picking up clues, Pard Bill."

"I may be wrong in this, Brad, but so I figure it out, and that is why I said Nick's Own must be a sub-leader."

"The men have their numbers cut in the stone, the officers gold and silver inlaid, and Nick's Own was Number Two and silver, you say?" Brad remarked thoughtfully. "Have you seen any other of these rings here in Danger Divide?"

"Yes, Brad; right here, to-night, in the Gambler's Eden Saloon."

"How many?"

"The three pards of Nick's Own wore them."

"Then that ring is a secret emblem among them, without a doubt."

"It is; and so will be the means of my spotting more of the band."

"We must spot them all—every one of them, Cody! Not one must escape!"

"That's the work, Loyd, for us—to spot them all. I will show you the ring when we are where there is a light."

"Well, Pard Bill, I'll tell you frankly the fact, now—that I have been for two years a United States Secret Service Officer here; but, though knowing that these coaches must be robbed by men in or about Danger Divide, I have never been able to put my hands upon one of them. I have suspected several, but did not dare go wrong and make a bad break; but here you come along and in a day and night make a discovery that is worth more than my whole two years' work."

"I am glad to know you are a Government detective, Brad, for we can work all the better together."

"But tell me this, Pard Bill! You had some trouble with Jack Dashaway to-night. Does he wear one of those rings?"

"He does not."

"I am glad to know this; and that boy, Billy Brass, does he wear one?"

"He does not."

"That is good news, too, for I confess I've taken a great liking to them both."

"And I admit as much, Brad; I've a deep interest in both Jack and the boy, for I believe there is more in them and their being here than any one suspects," added Buffalo Bill.

CHAPTER XVIII.

BUFFALO BILL SEEKS INFORMATION.

The landlord was thoughtful for a moment over this suggestion of the observant messenger of Phil Sheridan. Then he added:

"I never have noticed any of those rings; but you know most every miner wears a ring of some kind."

"Yes, but take sharp notice after this; only be careful not to let any one who wears such a ring see you looking at it."

"I will be careful; but another question:

"Did Knock Out Kit have one on?"

"He did not."

"I had an idea that if any deviltry was going on that fellow was in some way connected with it."

"But you gave him a lesson to-night he will remember to his dying day, if he passes the Bible record of three score and ten years."

"He deserved the lesson."

"Oh, yes; badly. But do you know the boys have hunted high and low for some one to down him, have paid some men big money, and then seen their man whipped in short order. But, several times have I seen him whip men whom I was sure could better him; and on three different occasions he has killed his men with his blows. Now let me add something more:

"Well, Brad?"

"Several times when I have seen him down a man I have thought of you, and only two weeks ago said to Jack Dashaway that if Knock Out Kit ever met you that would finish him."

"You know, I recall what you could do with the strong men of the fort and never try."

"I am not much on science in boxing, Brad, but I can strike a blow that will tell, and when I can get one in am willing to take punishment to do so."

"Yes, and no man can stand more punishment than you. Why, that fellow would have gotten tired of punishing you before you would have thought you were hurt! But, let me say right here:

"Look out for him, Pard Bill, for he's as treacherous as a snake."

"I will keep my eye upon him, rest assured. Now, tell me what you know about Jack Dashaway."

"Pard Bill, that is a fellow I liked at first sight, and would be a friend to if he would only let me be so."

"What kind of a fellow is he?"

"I hardly know how to answer you, for when I have caught him off his guard, I have seen him look so sad it was pitiful. He seemed to be living over some memory of the past; but, the moment he has suspected any one of looking at him, his face has changed to a look almost devilish in expression, and he would go to the bar and drink viciously, as though he was anxious to quickly drown all sorrow."

"Do you know anything about him—who he is and where he came from?"

"He is a mystery to me; but, I am sure he was well reared and is educated well, in spite of his rough manners."

"Where does he live?"

"In a cabin up the mountains all alone."

"Have you ever been there?"

"Have been by there, but never inside, nor has any one else."

"And that is all you know of him?"

"Well, no."

"What else?"

"He is a man killer."

"He has killed a number of men, then?"

"Yes; but, do you know, he somehow always seems in the right."

"The men fear him?"

"They do."

"Has he killed any particular class of men?"

"The worst of the camps, I should say. I don't remember a man he has killed whom we have grieved over—that is, the better class of miners. But, all were amazed at what he stood from you to-night, for the boys have told me all about it."

"He had been drinking and snatched my cigar out of my mouth, so I cut the ashes off of it and made him return it."

"And politely handed him another?"

"Oh, yes."

"Then shot a glass of liquor out of his hand as he raised it to his lips."

"Yes; between you and me, he said he wished to stop drinking, so I thought I'd help him along."

"A most dangerous way of persuasion, I must say; but you always did send a bullet just where you aim, I well remember."

"Now, Brad, about another one of your camp characters—Billy Brass: What of him?"

"He is a strange boy, Pard Bill," said Brad Loyd, slowly and thoughtfully, "mighty strange; I really don't know what to say about him."

CHAPTER XIX.

A BOY WITH A SECRET.

"What do you know about him, Brad?"

"Nothing, I may say; but, Pard Bill?"

"Well?"

"He is playing a part."

"Think so?"

"I am sure of it."

"What kind of a part, Brad?"

"He is not what he seems."

"What is he, then?"

"I don't know."

"What does he seem?"

"Well, you see him as he appears, not as he really is."

"A young tough, ignorant, reckless, and quarrelsome; is that it?"

"You are away off on that, Pard Bill. He appears to be what you say, but is not, by a long shot."

"He certainly looks and acts like a young desperado."

"Pard Bill, you are too true a reader of human nature to read that boy as he outwardly appears."

"I refer to him as he appears to others, and wish to hear your own private judgment on him, for I believe you have such a judgment."

"Well, I confess I have, and you shall have it. To begin with, he is not ignorant, for he writes a beautiful hand, as I got him to do some work for me. That was just a blind, but I wanted to test him."

"Well?"

"He spells and writes with perfect precision, for as I am college bred, I am a competent judge."

"You are a college graduate, Brad?"

"Oh, yes. I was born rich, was left a fortune, was cheated out of it, and in my despair enlisted in the army."

"I do not regret it, now, for it taught me life in its roughness, and I will make and enjoy my own hard-earned riches, as I am not yet thirty-five, so have years of comfort before me, I hope. Now, as to my judgment of Billy Brass."

I think the boy is out here for other purpose than to be a tough kid."

"He is a man killer, I am told."

"You bet he is."

"That looks bad for a boy of his years."

"Pard Bill, you took his part to-night?"

"Yes, for it was a case where no man should see a mere boy imposed upon or worsted."

"Did you talk with him?"

"Had very little to say to him."

"What did you think of the way he handled that ugly knife of his?"

"Splendid!"

"He is a swordsman, and a magnificent one, too; that I saw."

"I told you he was educated."

"Yes, in the way he handled that knife he showed science as well as nerve. He must have been taught in some military school here or in Europe."

"Have you seen him shoot?"

"No."

"There is but one man in the mines his equal, or was so, until you came."

"Who is that?"

"Jack Dashaway."

"Then he is an expert in the use of weapons?"

"Yes, and with a pen, also, as I told you, while, in spite of his frightful slang and camp dialect, he can speak as the well educated should speak."

"He is an anomaly, evidently."

"None greater that I ever met, and the question is, what is such a boy, as he certainly is, doing in these mines?"

"Not knowing, can't say!"

"He is here, as I feel sure Jack Dashaway is, for some mysterious purpose, but what is that purpose, is the problem."

"The way he kills men, I should say his purpose mainly is to make a graveyard."

"Yes, he has killed about a dozen, I believe."

"Now, Brad, have you noticed the kind of men he has killed?"

"In each case, yes. All were about on the par with Jack Dashaway's human game—the worst kind of border ruffians and bad men."

"Has it ever struck you that the boy and Jack Dashaway might secretly be pards?"

"I confess it has not; but it may be so. They are generally set down as bitter foes."

"I do not believe they are, though they may not be, as I suggested—partners."

"You look at things in a very penetrating way, Pard Bill, and it may be you are right."

"Has the boy never betrayed any deep feeling to you?"

"No, not intentionally; but I have watched him very closely, and have discovered that, in his moments of thought, all of the desperado would fade from his face, and I have seen him look positively womanly."

"I tell you, Pard Bill, that boy has a secret he keeps to himself. He has seen much of the world, I am sure of that, for I heard him once talk in purest French to a Canadian miner; and again, he wrote a letter in Spanish for a Mexican who had been shot through the right hand."

"Keep your eagle eye upon him, and upon Jack Dashaway, Pard Cody, for they'll not escape your search for truth, I am sure."

"Where does the boy live?"

"Alone, and in the mountains; but he is constantly on the go."

"But come; it is late, and I wish to show you your quarters."

As the two friends moved away they failed to see a dark form standing in the shadow of the cabin, and whose ears had doubtless taken in all that had been said!

CHAPTER XX.

ON HIS LAST LONG TRAIL.

Landlord Brad Loyd had built for himself a very comfortable cabin.

A natural mechanic, he had made it the only attractive home in Danger Divide, and occupying one-half of it himself, he kept the other part for special guests who might arrive in the mines.

Into this cabin Buffalo Bill was taken, and he was at once made to feel at home there.

As "William Frederick, Sport at Large," he was set down, but the name given him by Jack Dashaway, the "Sure Shot Sport," was the one that caught the fancy of the people of that wild community, and as such he was to be known.

The scenes of the night in the Gambler's Eden had made an impression, and the new man had decidedly shown that he was not one to be run over, that he would make himself felt in the community, if he was interfered with.

The next morning after his arrival he went to the Gambler's Eden and selected the table where he had been sitting the night before as the one he wished to call his own while there.

It was in a secluded part of the saloon, as has been said, apart from the others, and in a corner, yet commanded a good view of the place and the crowds, was convenient to the entrance, and the very place for a man brought to bay to defend himself.

He got a better table than the one there, bought an easy chair from a miner, and showed that he intended to make himself comfortable.

Landlord Brad Loyd had some fine horses in his stable, and as the Sure Shot Sport had brought along as part of his baggage a very handsome saddle and bridle, he secured the best of the animals for his own use, and started out upon a ride.

"You will have to be careful, Pard Bill, of the friends of Nick's Own," said Brad Loyd to him as he was mounting.

"You took the boy's part last night, and the pards of Nick's Own have it in for you, I feel sure."

"Just watch them, for they bury Nick this afternoon, and may be in an ugly mood."

"I shall attend the burial, Brad, for I have a curiosity to see the crowd there," was the answer, and Buffalo Bill rode off to get better acquainted with Danger Divide and its surroundings.

It was a typical mining camp in the mountains, here and there groups of cabins, and scattered along for miles the lone dwellings of men who lived apart from their fellows.

The tavern, saloons, blacksmith shop, and stores were in a group in the valley, where there was a pass through the mountains, and where several trails crossed.

Buffalo Bill hastily made the rounds, finding that he had a most excellent horse, and upon his return caught sight of a procession making its way to the head of the valley.

It was the funeral of Nick's Own, and it was largely attended, for, common occurrences as burials were, the crowd was wont to turn out to follow a body to the grave.

No matter who the man might be, in death he was treated to the respect of a large attendance at his funeral.

Buffalo Bill at once rode on after the burial party, not one of whom, however, was mounted, he being the sole horseman.

He fell in behind in a respectful manner, and observed in the crowd Jack Dashaway.

Naturally he next looked for Billy Brass, but the boy was not to be seen.

"It would be just like that boy to come here," he muttered.

There were a couple of hundred men in the procession, and the body, rudely coffined, was borne by eight strong fellows.

As they neared the pretty spot where the little burying ground was situated, Buffalo Bill saw that the population of dead almost equaled that of the living in Danger Divide.

Over many of the graves rude headboards had been placed, and here and there other marks of affection from some comrade.

Reading the inscriptions as he passed by, Buffalo Bill did not note one that had not on it the words:

"Killed by," etc.

There were few natural deaths in Danger Divide, if the headboards of the graves did not lie, as is so often the case one finds.

There was no parson who had yet had the temerity to seek converts in Danger Divide, so Nick's Own had to be placed under ground without other burial service than the singing of "Nearer, My God, to Thee," which, I may add, was peculiarly out of place, when it is considered that the dead man was the particular pet of "Old Nick," whose namesake he also was.

But the beautiful hymn was well sung by a score of fine voices, and the scout, who was yet a Stranger Sport to all there, set the example of taking off his hat in the presence of the dead, an act that was quickly followed by all.

Suddenly glancing around him, Buffalo Bill's eyes fell upon Billy Brass.

The boy had appeared from some thicket of cedars, and was standing with uncovered head, gazing upon the burial of the man whom he had killed.

It was a strange picture, Buffalo Bill thought, as he gazed upon the unmoved face of the boy.

CHAPTER XXI.

BROUGHT TO TERMS.

There was one thing that Buffalo Bill noticed, as he stood listening to the singing at Nick's Own's grave, and that was that half a dozen of the men present were watching Billy Brass with a peculiar expression, and had been whispering together, evidently about the boy.

He at once set it down in his mind that the boy had trouble ahead for him for coming to the burial of the man he had killed.

The singing over, the men who had acted as pall bearers seized shovels and began to fill up the grave, the boy still looking on with evident interest, and his presence there causing comment from many.

Suddenly three men approached the boy.

They were Utah Joe and his two particular pards, Utah Jim and Utah John.

They were the three who had been robbing the miners in the game of poker the night before, along with their pard whom they had just buried.

"Say, kid, you have come to this grave—"

yard without an invite, and I guess you'll stay here now," cried Utah Joe, as he covered the boy with a revolver.

Billy Brass was caught for once off his guard.

He did not appear to expect trouble there, and he was covered before he could draw a weapon.

But he did not flinch, and asked:

"What's your game now, Utah Joe, for you've got me foul, and no mistake."

"Yer come ter ther funeral of our pard without an invite, and fer it yer has ter crawl back ter Piggy's saloon on yer hands and knees, every step of ther way, or yer goes under."

"Now, down on yer creepers, or I'll chip yer with bullets until yer does."

"I'll not obey you, and if you hain't a coward, yer'll stand right across Nick's grave there and fight it out with me," said the boy, fearlessly.

"Fightin' kin be done after you has done ther crawlin'."

"Come, is you going to do as I tells yer, in punishment for yer coming here?"

"I will not!"

"Then—"

"Hold on there!"

It was the deep voice of Buffalo Bill which uttered the words, and he sat upon his horse, a revolver in each hand, one of them covering Utah Joe.

"What's you got ter put in fer?" cried Utah Jim.

"Just to have my say."

"This is a public place, and that boy had a right to come here if he wished to do so, though I think myself it would have been better for him to have stayed away."

"But he is here, and I'll befriend him, so go ahead as you think best."

The crowd was as silent as the dead about them.

The deep voice of Buffalo Bill was decided, and all saw that the stranger meant what he said.

"This is no place fer a killin'," growled Utah Joe, as though anxious to get out of the difficulty.

"Pardon me, but it's the very place for dead people," replied Buffalo Bill.

At this the crowd laughed.

Would the "Three Utahs," as the trio was called, who had the word Utah as a prefix to their names, stand their ground, or would they back down?

That was what interested all.

"See here, Stranger Pard, I thanks you, but I don't want ter draw you into no fight of mine."

"I said I'd meet Utah Joe across Nick's grave, and let that settle it right here," said the youth.

"That's fair!"

"You began it, Utah Joe!"

"Fight it out right here!"

"Stranger Sport, you holds the winning cards, so play 'em to win."

The cries showed how the crowd stood, but Buffalo Bill said:

"There is no need of trouble."

"Let that man retract his demand that the boy shall be punished for coming here, and that will settle it."

"No it won't."

"He wanted to make me crawl, so he's got ter meet me or crawl out of it like ther coward he is," cried Billy Brass.

A cheer greeted this, and Utah Joe said:

"I'll meet yer at ther saloon ter-night."

"You'll meet me now."

"Won't he, Stranger Sport?"

"He began the trouble, and if he refuses to meet you he writes himself down a coward," was the reply.

"That's so!" went up with a yell from the crowd.

Utah Joe was about to raise his revolver, but he was covered quickly by Buffalo Bill, who said:

"This shall be a fair fight."

There was no getting out of the scrape he had gotten himself into, for Brad Loyd was there, and his influence was at work, as was also Jack Dashaway's, and that of scores of good men.

So Utah Joe had to yield, the distance of twenty paces was stepped off, each duelist, revolver in hand, was placed ten steps away from the grave, their backs to each other, and at the word they were to wheel and advance, firing.

Buffalo Bill, still seated upon his horse, gave the word, they wheeled together, and their revolvers flashed together.

Utah Joe dropped dead, a bullet between his eyes.

Billy Brass was unhurt, and coolly walked away, on the trail up the mountain.

The comrades of Utah Joe took up the body and bore it in silence back to the cabin they had left one hour before, bearing their other dead pard.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE MEETING IN THE MOUNTAINS.

Buffalo Bill quietly rode away from the graveyard as the crowd dispersed, but did not take the same trail back to the camps.

Instead, he rode up the valley, made a flank movement, and, coming back along a ridge, halted at a point where there was a fine view.

He began to feel that there was considerable work ahead of him, for among the devoted friends of Nick's Own he had seen the signet ring of silver with the red stone.

"That is the band I am after, and what fools they are to wear openly a sign of their guilt."

"I will spot them all, and then bring them to book when I get them all together, for there must be no escaping for any of them."

So saying, Buffalo Bill rode down the trail, to suddenly come upon a lone cabin.

It was half a mile distant from any other, small, but comfortable, and situated right at the head of a small canyon.

As he halted and glanced up toward it a form suddenly appeared.

It was Billy Brass.

Seeing the Scout Detective, for such Buffalo Bill then was, the boy called out:

"Good evening, sir."

"Won't you come in and have supper with me?"

Buffalo Bill rode up to the cabin, and, dismounting, grasped the hand stretched out to him.

"So this is your home?"

"Yes, sir."

"You live all alone here?"

"All alone, sir."

"You are a brave lad, indeed; but I dislike to see one like you leading the wild, terrible life you do as a man killer in these mines."

"Are we not a good deal alike?" asked the boy.

"How so?"

"You are a man killer by profession, in the discharge of duty, while I am one from a sense of duty I owe to loved ones."

"I act for revenge, and to avenge."

Buffalo Bill looked at the boy with amazement.

"My poor fellow, it is hard indeed to have your young life clouded thus, and you have my sympathy."

"I felt that the moment you took my part last night; but I knew I could trust you when I found out who you were."

"And who am I?"

"Buffalo Bill, the great Government scout."

In spite of himself Buffalo Bill started. How had this boy ferreted him out in his disguise?

"Why do you think this?"

"I know it."

"I went last night to thank you for what you did for me, and I saw you on the piazza of the Refuge."

"I was going to speak to you, but Landlord Brad Loyd came up just then, and I hid in the shadow of the chimney, so I heard all that was said, and I know who you are and why you have come, so intended to see you to-night and tell you I can help you find those men you are after."

"You are a strange boy, and I will not deny my identity to you; but to all others it must remain a secret."

"Yes, indeed, for they'd kill you mighty quick if they knew who you are."

"You know they have a regular gang of outlaws here."

"It is the Nick's Own gang."

"Yes, and there are now just fifteen of them, for I have thinned down the number the past year by twelve, and, strange to say, Jack Dashaway has been picking off men from the same lot."

"You see, they were a mighty strong band three years ago, but have taken in no new men, and the bullet fever has cut down their number, as I said."

"You seem to know all about them?"

"I have been on their trail for fifteen months, and now know every man of them, and you are right about that ring, though I had not noticed it before."

"But I've done my work; finished it last night, though the fight with Utah Joe to-day was forced upon me."

"How have you finished your work?" asked the scout, with increasing interest.

"I'll tell you, for I am going to help you spot the outfit and corral them."

"I shall be glad to learn all that you care to tell me."

"It is soon told."

"I am a mountain-born boy, from Texas, and was acquainted with border ways when I was a little kid, for I lived on a ranch."

"My father died when I was twelve, leaving my mother, my sister of fifteen, and myself."

"He left us rich, too."

"But within two years after mother married again, while I was North at school, and on my return home at vacation I found that all my sister had written me was true, that our stepfather was a brute."

"I had trouble with him very quickly, for he struck my sister, and I shot him."

"Believing I had killed him, I ran off to sea."

"I was gone for three years, in a cruise about the world, and then returned home secretly."

"The story I learned was that the man my mother had married was a Mormon, and he had sold our property and taken her West to Utah."

"I also learned that my beautiful sister had also married and gone West, and it was said also with a Mormon."

"I at once followed, and when I reached Pinacle Heights I heard enough to convince me that outlaws, led by my stepfather, had attacked the coach in which was my sister, and had killed her."

"And more, I heard from a man I befriended that my mother was dead, killed

by her outlaw husband, and that my sister's husband had been slain with her.

"Then I started upon the trail of revenge," and the youth spoke almost savagely in his earnestness.

CHAPTER XXIII.

AS IT REALLY WAS.

Buffalo Bill had heard the boy's strange story with both sympathy and interest.

He now knew the trail of revenge the boy had been on, but asked him:

"How was it you found out what you did about your mother and sister?"

"I took the part of a man one night in Pinnacle Heights.

"He was wounded, and I cared for him several weeks, until he died.

"Learning my name, and knowing that he was going to die, he told me that he was a member of the outlaw band of Midnight Miners, as they call themselves, and that their chief was Hugh Manly, an outlawed Mormon.

"That was the name of my stepfather, and I further learned that, under his orders, Nick's Own had led the attack upon the coach in which was my sister and her husband, and both were killed.

"He also made known to me the name of each man who was in that murderous attack, and where they were to be found.

"It is those men I have been tracking, and I ended up with Nick's Own last night; but there are still the chief of the Midnight Miners and fourteen men left.

"These were not my sister's murderers, but they are red with other crimes, and I will help you hunt them down, in fact, know about where to find all of them, as the chief will arrive next Sunday, and then you can catch the whole outfit in the cabin where Nick's Own lived."

"My young friend, we will be there and get the gang.

"But I have a particular reason for knowing your real name."

"Gerald Jewett, sir.

"They gave me the names of Billy Brass and the Boy Desperado here in Danger Divide."

"Your sister's name was Jessie."

"Yes, sir; but how did you know that, for I have not mentioned it?"

"She married a man by the name of John Dashwood?"

"Yes, sir, that was his name."

"Well, he is not dead."

"Not dead, sir?"

"No."

"Do you know this?"

"I do."

"He was killed when my sister was, that dying man in Pinnacle Heights told me, sir."

"It was a mistake."

"Oh, tell me what you know, sir, about him."

"I will.

"He was not a Mormon, as you were led to believe; but a Western man, and I believe met your sister when she was at school, and he on a visit East.

"As I understand it, he knew that her stepfather was to take her mother and herself to Utah, and so they were secretly married.

"Your mother went West with her Mormon husband, and quite a while after your sister and her husband came on their way westward, the coach was held up not far beyond Pinnacle Heights, and what became of your sister I do not know; but her husband was wounded, and when he returned to consciousness found her gone, and he believed dead.

"It was this same band of Midnight Miners who did the work, and your brother-in-law got well, and then began his work of revenge, as you did."

"And you know him?"

"I do."

"And will tell me?"

"Yes, though I have believed you were really secretly pards."

"It is Jack Dashaway!" cried the boy.

"Yes, John Dashwood is his real name."

"Thank God!

"We have both been on the same trail of revenge, and neither knew it, neither knew the other."

"That is not strange, as you had never met."

"Very true; but how did he know those men?"

"It was the Midnight Miners who attacked his coach, and he impressed the face of each man upon his heart and brain, he told me last night, and when he could he brought them to book.

"How strange, how strange!

"But I'll soon find him."

"No, let me tell him all, and you be at the Gambler's Eden to-night.

"We will talk it all over together, and you know you are still to have all go on as before, for we must catch the whole gang."

"Yes, all of them, sir."

"I can rely upon Brad Loyd, for he is an old friend of mine, and you, Jack Dashaway, and myself, so that we can win the game, and through you, much sooner than I had hoped, I assure you.

"Now I will go on back to Danger Divide, see both the landlord and Jack Dashaway, and meet you to-night."

Buffalo Bill mounted and started at a canter for Danger Divide, greatly pleased at his discovery.

"Why, this will be a double deal for me, and no mistake, for I shall capture this band of Midnight Miners, and if that don't end in discovering that this boy's sister and Jack Dashaway's wife is yet alive, and somewhere around here, with his mother, I will be greatly mistaken."

And Buffalo Bill felt in a very good humor.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A FAIR VISITOR.

Back to his comfortable quarters in Danger Divide went Buffalo Bill, and as he ate supper with Landlord Brad Loyd that evening, the latter heard the whole story of his discovery of who the Boy Desperado and Jack Dashaway were.

"Neither of them must be seen in the saloon to-night, for there will be more trouble, and all your good work might be spoiled.

"I will send them here, and you can tell them all.

"Then they can go back to their respective cabins and await until the trap can be sprung, when that chief arrives on Sunday night."

"That is the best plan, Brad, and we'll so have things go," was Buffalo Bill's answer.

Later he went into the Gambler's Eden and found a large crowd there.

But neither the boy nor Jack Dashaway appeared, and when he had seen all he cared for, Buffalo Bill left the saloon, and as he did so overheard Utah Jim's remark:

"Some time we'll call in his chips, pards."

The scout paid no attention to the re-

mark, and, going to his cabin, found Jack Dashaway there with the landlord.

It did not take him long to tell him the story of the Boy Desperado, and Jack Dashaway was deeply moved by all he heard.

Soon after the youth himself came in with Brad Loyd, and the meeting of the two, bound together by such strange and strong ties, yet never having met before, was an affecting one, tears coming into the eyes of the youth as he gazed at his sister's likeness in Jack's watch.

It was late when the four separated that night, the boy and Jack Dashaway to go to their homes.

But before they left a plan had been arranged for the capture of the Midnight Miners on Sunday night, when their chief would be with them at the rendezvous cabin.

It was about noon the next morning, as Buffalo Bill was about to leave his cabin, when up dashed a man and a young girl on horseback.

The man was dressed in civilian suit, had a heavily bearded face, and his companion wore a handsome dark blue riding habit, slouch hat, and veil.

"We have been sent here to get quarters until the stage leaves for the East," said the man.

Buffalo Bill looked into the face of the girl, and knew it at a glance.

It was the very face he had seen in Jack Dashaway's watch.

Before him was the man of all men he wished to secure, the girl of all women he wished to find, for she was there to prove in person that she had not been killed at the time of the attack on the stage coach.

Dropping his hand behind him, until it rested upon the a revolver in his rear coat pocket, Buffalo Bill said:

"Yes, Hugh Manley, you can be accommodated here, as can also that lady, Mrs. John Dashwood."

The words of Buffalo Bill caused the girl to start and utter a cry of alarm, while the man seemed as though struck a hard blow by what the disguised scout had said to him.

Then followed a moment of silence, while a crowd of miners came toward the cabin rapidly, Landlord Brad Loyd at their head.

"Mrs. Dashwood, recognizing you, as I do, I will take you under my charge, and you, sir, I will take into custody, for you are my prisoner!"

The scout had suddenly covered the man with a revolver and, at the same instant, he sprang from the piazza and grasped his bridle rein.

The woman, meanwhile, was the picture of surprise.

But her escort?

He had turned deadly pale, yet he made no offer of resistance, only saying, as he obeyed Buffalo Bill's order to dismount:

"There is some frightful mistake here, sir. You shall repent of this."

"I shall hold myself responsible, sir, for all I do. Come into the house with me, quick, before I have to explain to these men who are coming just who you are. That would mean a hanging party, as you know."

The man hastily followed the scout, who called out, as Landlord Loyd ran up:

"See to that lady's comfort, Brad, for she is in trouble. I will explain to her soon, but now the crowd must not know.

"Say to the crowd that the lady is all right, but that the man is an old offender against the law."

With this Buffalo Bill disappeared in the cabin with his prisoner, who still seemed half dazed, and in an instant he had clasped upon his wrists a pair of steel manacles.

The young woman had uttered no protest, and as Brad Loyd explained to the crowd she made no contradiction.

This satisfied the men, who were surprised at Buffalo Bill's quick act, and as she went with the landlord into the cabin, the men outside turned to go back to the saloon, all wondering where the beautiful girl had come from, and who was the man that had her in charge.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE DEATH BLOW.

Into his own quarters in the cabin Landlord Loyd led his fair visitor and enforced guest. She was very pale, and sank down into the seat he placed for her in a tired way.

"I don't know just what it all means, miss, but I do know the man who arrested your—your—father, shall I say, and he means all right, I'll vouch for him. If he has made a mistake, he will quickly say so," explained the landlord.

"He called us both by name, sir, so must know us," said the girl.

"Indeed! Then he does know you. But, may I ask where you are from?"

"Beyond the line, sir, up in Utah."

"Ah! and came here to take the east-bound coach?"

"Yes, sir."

"The man is your father, then?"

"My stepfather, sir."

"And you came here alone?"

"No, we have an escort of two men along, but they were sent to the cabin of some friends they have in the camps, and will stop with them, for they return to Utah while we take the stage east to-morrow, Sunday."

At this moment Buffalo Bill entered the room, and the young woman fixed her eyes upon him and said:

"Will you explain this action of yours, sir?"

"I will, miss, and quickly, for there is much to be done."

"The man in whose care I find you is Hugh Manley the Outlaw Mormon, and known to a few men here as their chief. These confederates of his are outlaws, bearing the name of the Midnight Miners. They are the cutthroat band that has committed untold crimes for several years."

"I am here to hunt them down, and now have their chief secure, while the whole band will soon be in custody."

"Can this be true?" gasped the woman.

"Wholly so."

"And who are you?"

"An army scout, known as Buffalo Bill. I came here on the track of these outlaws, and one of the first men I met was a poor fellow who had a strange story to tell."

"He had become an avenger out here in the mines, and I don't wonder, for he had won a loved wife in Texas, and was taking her westward, when the coach they traveled in was attacked by outlaws, he was wounded, and returned to consciousness to find himself lying by the side of the trail, and to believe his loved young wife had, with the coach, been hurled to death over a precipice into a stream."

"Then he vowed to avenge her, and only two nights ago told me his sad story and how he believed her dead, that

he had struck it rich in gold, but cared not for it now. His name is John Dashwood, and—"

The scout said no more. He saw that the woman understood all, and, springing up, she grasped his hands, and tears fell fast and hot upon them.

At length she said, between her sobs:

"And I have believed him dead, and sorrowing for him, have been content to live in the wilds of Utah, where I was taken when rescued from outlaws by the very man you have accused of being their chief."

"That man married my mother in Texas, and, though I never liked him, he was devoted to her."

"He took her to a ranch in a mountain valley of Utah, and there he carried me, for, of course, he recognized me when he rescued me."

"Day by day I have cared for my mother as she faded away, and a month ago she died and was laid to rest."

"Then I said I would return East, and my stepfather, whom you say is an outlaw chief, was taking me back to my old home, where late letters to my mother show that there is a fortune awaiting me now and my brother, Gerald, of whose fate I know nothing, for he had trouble with our stepfather years ago, shot him, and fled to sea."

"But, I shall find him, and if, as you tell me, my noble husband is alive, he will aid me."

"I can help you in this also, Mrs. Dashwood, for I know your brother. He is now out in this country looking for you!" said Buffalo Bill.

"Oh, this seems too good to be true!" cried the young woman.

Buffalo Bill, in his quiet way, went on to tell her about her brother, and that he, too, had been on an avenging trail. Until the night before, though often meeting, neither the boy nor Miner Jack Dashaway had known each other, Cody explained.

When all had been told Buffalo Bill said:

"Now, Mrs. Dashwood, you must do all you can to help capture that whole outlaw band."

"I will gladly do so."

"Then walk out in the camps with me and appear perfectly pleasant, and let me make what explanation I please, if questioned about my action in holding up Hugh Manley."

"I will."

"And you, landlord, gag Manley, and put a man you can trust to guard him."

"I'll do so, Cody."

"Then take your gun, as for a hunt, and go to the cabins of Billy Brass and Jack Dashaway, and tell them just what has happened."

"I will."

"As soon as it is dark tell them to come here, but not before; then gather a score of men you are sure you can trust and tell them you want them for deadly work to-night."

"Yes; I can have two score, if necessary, Cody."

"Then we will go over to the outlaws' cabin and take in the whole gang."

"It is just what we will do, Pard Cody."

The landlord left the cabin, but soon came back with one of his best men. The prisoner was at once gagged and put under the man's guardianship.

Soon after Brad Loyd rode away, gun in hand, for a hunt, all thought, but to go and carry out the rest of his mission.

Later, Buffalo Bill and the lovely young wife, so long considered dead, made a

tour of the camps together, and everywhere she met with the most courteous salutations.

At length night came on; the landlord returned, and, soon after, Billy Brass slipped into the cabin, and was face to face with his sister!

Half an hour after John Dashwood entered the cabin, and each welcomed the other as from the grave.

CHAPTER XXVI.

CONCLUSION.

The two men who had escorted Hugh Manley and Jessie Dashwood on the trail from Utah had gone with their pack horses to the cabin where Nick's Own had lived.

They had received a warm welcome, and at once gave out that their chief, Captain Redhand, had arrived in Danger Divide, and was over at the House of Refuge with his stepdaughter, with whom he was going East to get possession of some property.

As he had arrived sooner than expected, a meeting at the cabin would be held that night, and word was at once sent out for each man to meet there an hour after darkness set in.

Each man was promptly on time, and when all were assembled, it was found, with the two guards of their chief, that there were just twelve.

"Ther chief will make thirteen, pards, and it's an unlucky number," said Utah Jim.

"I goes by good luck and bad luck, so yer kin tell ther chief I jist got out ter make it all right," called out Utah John.

With this he was moving to the door, but stopped short as it was thrust open and Buffalo Bill stepped in, a revolver in each hand!

Behind him came Billy Brass, Jack Dashaway, Landlord Brad Loyd, and over a score of miners, all armed with rifles.

"Men, your chief is my prisoner, so hands up, all round, or take the consequences!" cried Buffalo Bill.

"What fer?" gasped Utah Jim.

"Every man here wears a ring that designates him as a member of the Midnight Miners. Do you surrender?"

"Who is you?"

"Buffalo Bill, the Government Scout!" shouted Billy Brass, and a groan followed his announcement from the group before them.

But, some showed fight; shots rattled; men on both sides were stricken, but at length six prisoners were marched out—that was all.

The miners were wild now. In vain did Buffalo Bill and others try to control them. They dragged the prisoners up to the front of the Gambler's Eden, where a gallows stood, a beam between two trees.

Hugh Manley was dragged out with his men, and in ten minutes' time the outlaw band of Midnight Miners had ended their careers forever.

Danger Divide had avenged the stain put upon it by the presence there of the assassin band.

The next stage Eastward carried John Dashwood and his beautiful wife; and Gerald Jewett, once known as Billy Brass, the Boy Desperado, also went along, accompanied by Buffalo Bill, who returned to his duties at the fort.

The miner, his wife, and Gerald went to their old Texas home, and there they still live; but never can they forget the Dark Days at Danger Divide.

THE END.

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366 Velvet Foot, the Indian Detective.
386 Captain Outlass; or, The Buccaneer's Girl Fox.
396 Rough Rob; or, The Twin Champions of Blue Blazes.
411 The Silken Lasso; or, The Rose c. Ranch Robin.
418 Felix Fox, the Boy Spotter; or, The Gold Gang of New York.
425 Texas Tramp, the Border Rattler.
436 Phil Flash, the New York Fox; or, The Mystery of Room 21.
445 The City Vampires; or, Red Rolfe's Pigeon.
461 One Against Fifty; or, The Last Man of Keno Bar.
470 The Boy Shadow; or, Felix Fox's Hunt.
477 The Excelsior Sport; or, The Washington Spotter.
499 Single Sight, the One-Eyed Sport.
502 Branded Ben, the Night Ferret.
512 Dodger Dick, the Wharf-Spy Detective.
521 Dodger Dick's Best Dodge; or, The Gotham Gold Gang.
528 Fox and Falcon, the Bowery Shadows.
538 Dodger Dick, the Dock Ferret.
543 Dodger Dick's Double; or, The Rival Boy Detectives.
553 Dodger Dick's Desperate Case.
563 Dodger Dick, the Boy Vidocq; or, The Gang of Three.
573 The Two Shadows; or, Dodger Dick's Stop Game.
582 Dodger Dick's Drop; or, The Man from Jersey.
594 Little Lon, the Street-Singer Detective.
610 Old Skinner, the Gold Shark; or, Tony Sharp on Guard.
626 The Champion Pards; or, The Lucifer of Silver Bar.
637 Dick Donn, the Dock Boy Detective.
645 Kit, the Pavement Sharp.
653 Billy Bantam, the Boy Beagle.
671 Jersey Jed, the Boy Hustler; or, Shadowing the Shadower.
685 Happy Hugh, the Boy-Musician Detective.
701 Photograph Fred, the Camera Sharp.
715 Wide Awake Len, the Quaker City Ferret.
732 Daisy Dell, the Pavement Detective; or, Trapping Big Game.
742 Billy Winks, the Bell Boy Detective.
754 Billy Winks, the Boss Boy Shadow.
768 Eagle Ned, the Boy on Guard; or, The Camp Spiders.
780 Tonkaway Tom, the Red Wizard.
827 The Bantam Sport.
848 Chip, the Battery Ferret; or, Jack's Foul Play.
897 Davy Doon's Big Bounce.
905 Dandy Nugget, the Boy Shadow.
921 The Boy from Denver.

BY CHARLES MORRIS.

118 Will Somers, the Boy Detective.
122 Phil Hardy, the Boss Boy.
126 Picayune Pete; or, Nicodemus, the Dog Detective.
130 Detective Dick; or, The Hero in Rags.
142 Handsome Harry, the Bootblack Detective.
147 Will Wildfire, the Thoroughbred.
152 Black Bess, Will Wildfire's Racer.
157 Mike Merry, the Harbor Police Boy.
162 Will Wildfire in the Woods.
165 Billy Baggage, the Railroad Boy.
170 A Trump Card; or, Will Wildfire Wins and Loses.
174 Bob Rockett; or, Mysteries of New York.
179 Bob Rockett, the Bank Runner.
188 The Hidden Hand; or, Will Wildfire's Revenge.
187 Fred Halyard, the Life Boat Boy; or, The Smugglers.
189 Bob Rockett; or, Driven to the Wall.
196 Shadowed; or, Bob Rockett's Fight for Life.
206 Dark Paul, the Tiger King.
212 Dashing Dave, the Dandy Detective.
220 Tom Tanner; or, The Black Sheep of the Flock.
225 Sam Charcoal, the Premium Dandy.
235 Shadow Sam, the Messenger Boy.
242 The Two "Bloods"; or, Shenandoah Bill and His Gang.
252 Dick Dashaway; or, A Dakota Boy in Chicago.
262 The Young Sharps; or, Rollicking Mike's Hot Trail.
274 Jolly Jim, the Detective Apprentice.
289 Jolly Jim's Job; or, The Young Detective.
298 The Water-Hound; or, The Young Thoroughbred.
305 Dashaway, of Dakota; or, A Western Lad in Quaker City.
324 Ralph Ready, the Hotel Boy Detective.
341 Tony Thorne, the Vagabond Detective.
353 The Reporter Detective; or, Fred Flyer's Blizzard.
367 Wide-Awake Joe; or, A Boy of the Times.
379 Larry, the Leveler; or, The Bloods of the Boulevard.
403 Fleely Jack, the River-Rat Detective.
423 The Lost Finger; or, The Entrapped Cashier.
428 Fred Flyer, the Reporter Detective.
432 Invincible Logan, the Pinkerton Ferret.
456 Billy Brick, the Jolly Vagabond.
466 Wide-Awake Jerry, Detective; or, Entombed Alive.
479 Detective Dodge; or, The Mystery of Frank Hearty.
488 Wild Dick Racket; or, How He Fought for Honor.
501 Boots, the Boy Fireman; or, Too Sharp for the Sharper.
566 The Secret Service Boy Detective.
596 Jimmy the Kid; or, A Lamb Among Wolves.
627 Tom Bruce of Arkansas; or, The Wolf in the Fold.
655 Plucky Paul, the Boy Speculator.
667 Bob and Sam, the Daisy Detectives.
709 The Curbstone Detective; or, Harry Hale's Big Beat.
757 Detective Frank's Sweep-stakes.
869 Ned Norman, the Gamin Broker.
881 Turkey Billy, the Shine-Jem-up Detective.
917 Flash Lightning, the Mountain Mascot.

BY ALBERT W. AIKEN.

11 The Two Detectives; or, The Fortunes of a Bowery Girl.
76 Abe Colt, the Crow-Killer.
79 Sol Ginger, the Giant Trapper.
333 Joe Buck of Angels and His Boy Pard.
447 New York Nat, A Tale of Tricks and Traps in Gotham.
458 New England Nick; or, The Fortunes of a Foundling.
464 Nimble Nick, the Circus Prince.
493 Taos Ted, the Arizona Sport.
510 Cool Colorado, the Half-Breed Detective.
518 Cool Colorado in New York; or, The Cowboy's Fight.

BY CAPT. ALFRED B. TAYLOR U. S. A.

191 Buffalo Billy, the Boy Bullwhacker.
194 Buffalo Bill's Bet; or, The Gambler Guide.

BY J. W. OSBON.

469 The Rival Giants of Nowhar.
498 Cactus Burr, the Man from Hard Luck.
537 Old Buckeye, the Sierra Shadow.
564 Powder Phil, the Boy Miner, or, The Man Without a Past.
609 Bolly Dorrit, the Veteran Detective.
620 Little Lightning's League; or, The Mystery of the Island.
633 Plucky Paul, the Boy Prospector.
751 Gold-Dust Dan, the Trail Patrol.
755 Gold Dust Dan's Catch; or, Reckless Roy, the Regulator.
923 Gold-Dust Dan's Snap-Shot.

BY JOSEPH E. BADGER, JR.

2 Yellowstone Jack; or, The Trapper.
48 Black John, the Road-Agent; or, The Outlaw's Retreat.
65 Hurricane Bill; or, Mustang Sam and His Pard.
119 Mustang Sam; or, The King of the Plains.
133 Night-Hawk Kit; or, The Daughter of the Ranch.
144 Dainty Lance, the Boy Sport.
151 Panther Paul; or, Dainty Lance to the Rescue.
160 The Black Giant; or, Dainty Lance in Jeopardy.
168 Deadly Dash; or, Fighting Fire with Fire.
184 The Boy Trappers; or, Dainty Lance on the War-Path.
203 The Boy Pards; or, Dainty Lance Unmasked.
211 Crooked Cale, the Caliban of Celestial City.
310 The Barranca Wolf; or, The Beautiful Decoy.
319 The Black Rider; or, The Horse-Thieves' League.
335 Old Double Fist; or, The Strange Guide.
355 The King of the Woods; or, Daniel Boone's Last Trail.
449 Kit Fox, the Border Boy Detective.
625 Chincapin Dan, the Boy Trapper.
677 Chincapin Dan's Second Trail.
688 Chincapin Dan's Home Stretch.
698 Old Crazy, the Man Without a Head.
708 Light-Heart Lute's Legacy.
718 Light-Heart Lute's Last Trail.
723 Silverblade, the Shoshone.
729 Silverblade, the Half-Blood; or, The Border Beagle at Bay.
739 Silverblade, the Hostile; or, The Border Beagle's Trail.
748 Silverblade, the Friendly; or, The Border Beagle's Boy Pard.

BY C. DUNNING CLARK.

135 Captain Paul; or, The Boy Spy of the Mountains.
230 The Yankee Rajah; or, The Fate of the Black Sheriff.

BY LIEUT. H. D. PERRY, U. S. N.

176 The Boy Runaway; or, The Buccaneer of the Bay.
180 The Sea Trapper; or, A Vow Well Kept.
192 Captain Kit; or, The Mystery of Montauk Point.

BY JACK FARRAGUT.

315 Ned, the Cabin Boy; or, The Witch of the Fort.
320 The Sea Sorceress; or, The Boy Skipper.

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78 Blue Dick; or, The Yellow Chief's Vengeance.
137 The Land Pirates; or, The League of Devil's Island.
137 The Helpless Hand; or, Backwoods Retribution.
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89 Island Jim; or, The Pet of the Family.
91 The Captain of the Club; or, The Rival Athletes.
101 Jack Harkaway in New York.

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- 28 Deadwood Dick in Disguise; or, Buffalo Ben.
- 35 Deadwood Dick in His Castle.
- 42 Deadwood Dick's Bonanza; or, The Phantom Miner.
- 49 Deadwood Dick in Danger; or, Omaha Oil.
- 57 Deadwood Dick's Eagles; or, The Pards of Flood Bar.
- 78 Deadwood Dick on Deck; or, Calamity Jane, the Heroine.
- 77 Deadwood Dick's Last Act; or, Corduroy Charlie.
- 100 Deadwood Dick in Leadville.
- 104 Deadwood Dick's Device; or, The Double Cross Sign.
- 109 Deadwood Dick as Detective.
- 129 Deadwood Dick's Double; or, The Gorgon's Gulch Ghost.
- 138 Deadwood Dick's Home Base; or, Blonds Bill.
- 149 Deadwood Dick's Big Strike; or, A Game of Gold.
- 156 Deadwood Dick of Deadwood; or, The Picked Party.
- 195 Deadwood Dick's Dream; or, The Rivals of the Road.
- 201 Deadwood Dick's Ward; or, The Black Hill's Jezebel.
- 205 Deadwood Dick's Doom; or, Calamity Jane's Adventure.
- 217 Deadwood Dick's Dead Deal.
- 221 Deadwood Dick's Death-Plant.
- 232 Gold-Dust Dick, A Romance of Roughs and Toughs.
- 265 Deadwood Dick's Divide; or, The Spirit of Swamp Lake.
- 268 Deadwood Dick's Death Trail.
- 309 Deadwood Dick's Deal; or, The Gold Brick of Oregon.
- 321 Deadwood Dick's Dozen; or, The Fakir of Phantom Flats.
- 347 Deadwood Dick's Ducats; or, Days in the Diggings.
- 351 Deadwood Dick Sentenced; or, The Terrible Vendetta.
- 362 Deadwood Dick's Claim.
- 405 Deadwood Dick in Dead City.
- 410 Deadwood Dick's Diamonds.
- 421 Deadwood Dick in New York; or, A "Cute Case."
- 430 Deadwood Dick's Dust; or, The Chained Hand.
- 443 Deadwood Dick, Jr.; or, The Crimson Crescent Sign.
- 448 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Defiance.
- 458 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Full Hand.
- 459 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Big Round-Up.
- 465 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Racket at Claim 10.
- 471 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Corral; or, Bozeman Bill.
- 476 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Dog Detective.
- 481 Deadwood Dick, Jr., in Deadwood.
- 491 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Compact.
- 496 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Inheritance.
- 500 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Diggings.
- 508 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Deliverance.
- 515 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Protegee.
- 522 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Three.
- 529 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Danger Ducks.
- 534 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Death Hunt.
- 539 Deadwood Dick, Jr., in Texas.
- 544 Deadwood Dick, Jr., the Wild West Video.
- 549 Deadwood Dick, Jr., on His Mettle.
- 554 Deadwood Dick, Jr., in Gotham.
- 561 Deadwood Dick, Jr., in Boston.
- 567 Deadwood Dick, Jr., in Philadelphia.
- 572 Deadwood Dick, Jr., in Chicago.
- 578 Deadwood Dick, Jr., Aloft.
- 584 Deadwood Dick, Jr., in Denver.
- 590 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Decree.
- 595 Deadwood Dick, Jr., in Beelzebub's Basin.
- 600 Deadwood Dick, Jr., at Coney Island.
- 606 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Leadville Lay.
- 612 Deadwood Dick, Jr., in Detroit.
- 618 Deadwood Dick, Jr., in Cincinnati.
- 624 Deadwood Dick, Jr., in Nevada.
- 630 Deadwood Dick, Jr., in No Man's Land.
- 636 Deadwood Dick, Jr., After the Queer.
- 642 Deadwood Dick, Jr., in Buffalo.
- 648 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Chase Across the Continent.
- 654 Deadwood Dick, Jr., Among the Smugglers.
- 660 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Insurance Case.
- 666 Deadwood Dick, Jr., Back in the Mines.
- 672 Deadwood Dick, Jr., in Durango; or, "Gathered In."
- 678 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Discovery; or, Found a Fortune.
- 684 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Dazzle.
- 690 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Dollars.
- 695 Deadwood Dick, Jr., at Danger Divide.
- 700 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Drop.
- 704 Deadwood Dick, Jr., at Jack-Pot.
- 710 Deadwood Dick, Jr., in San Francisco.
- 716 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Still Hunt.
- 722 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Dominoes.
- 728 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Disguise.
- 734 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Double Deal.
- 740 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Deathwatch.
- 747 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Doublet.
- 752 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Deathblow.
- 758 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Desperate Strife.
- 764 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Lone Hand.
- 770 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Defeat.
- 776 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Resurrection.
- 782 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Dark Days.
- 787 Deadwood Dick, Jr., Defted.
- 792 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Double Device.
- 797 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Desperate Venture.
- 802 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Diamond Dice.
- 807 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Royal Flush.
- 812 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Head-off.
- 816 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Rival.
- 822 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Boom.
- 828 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Scoop.
- 834 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Proxy.
- 840 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Clutch.
- 845 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, High Horse.
- 852 Deadwood Dick, Jr., at Devil's Gulch.
- 858 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Death-Hole Hustle.
- 863 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Bombshell.
- 870 Deadwood Dick, Jr., in Mexico.
- 876 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Decey Duck.
- 882 Deadwood Dick, Jr., in Silver Pocket.
- 891 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Dead-Sure Game.
- 898 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Double Drive.
- 904 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Trade-Mark.
- 910 Deadwood Dick, Jr., at Tip-Top.
- 916 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Double-Decker.
- 928 Deadwood Dick, Jr., at Dollarville.
- 934 Deadwood Dick, Jr., at Flush Flats.
- 940 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Shake-up.
- 946 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Double Drop.
- 951 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Right Bower.
- 957 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Ten-Strike.
- 965 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Gold-Dust.
- 971 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Oath.
- 977 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Death-Doom.
- 986 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Best Card.
- 992 Deadwood Dick, Jr., at Gold Dust.
- 998 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Big Play.
- 1005 Deadwood Dick, Jr., Branded.
- 1011 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Dutch Pard.
- 1018 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Big Four.

BY ROBERT R. INMAN.

- 1036 Dandy Dick's Double.
- 1024 Dandy Dick, Detective.

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- 1041 Cowboy Chris to the Fore.
- 1032 Cowboy Chris, the Man of Caliber.

Other Novels by E. L. Wheeler.

- 80 Rosebud Rob; or, Nugget Ned, the Knight.
- 84 Rosebud Rob on Hand; or, Idyl, the Girl Miner.
- 88 Rosebud Rob's Reappearance; or, Photograph Phil.
- 121 Rosebud Rob's Challenge; or, Cinnamon Chip.
- 277 Denver Doll, the Detective Queen; or, The Yankee's Surround.
- 281 Denver Doll's Victory; or, Skull and Crossbones.
- 285 Denver Doll's Decoy; or, Little Bill's Bonanza.
- 296 Denver Doll's Drift; or, The Road Queen.
- 368 Yreka Jim, the Gold-Gatherer; or, The Life Lottery.
- 372 Yreka Jim's Prize; or, The Wolves of Wake-Up.
- 385 Yreka Jim's Joker; or, The Rivals of Red Nose.
- 394 Yreka Jim of Yuba Dam.
- 209 Fritz, the Bound-Boy Detective; or, Dot Lettle Game.
- 213 Fritz to the Front; or, The Ventriloquist Hunter.
- 244 Sierra Sam, the Frontier Ferret; or, A Sister's Devotion.
- 248 Sierra Sam's Secret; or, The Bloody Footprints.
- 253 Sierra Sam's Pard; or, The Angel of Big Vista.
- 258 Sierra Sam's Seven; or, The Stolen Bride.
- 334 Kangaroo Kit; or, The Mysterious Miner.
- 339 Kangaroo Kit's Racket; or, The Pride of Played-Out.
- 39 Death-Face, Detective; or, Life in New York.
- 96 Watch-Eye, the Detective; or, Arabs and Angels.
- 117 Gilt-Edged Dick, the Sport Detective.
- 145 Captain Ferret, the New York Detective.
- 161 New York Nell, the Boy-Girl Detective.
- 226 The Arab Detective; or, Snoozer, the Boy Sharp.
- 291 Turk the Boy Ferret.
- 325 Kelley, Hickey & Co., the Detectives of Philadelphia.
- 343 Manhattan Mike, the Bowery Detective.
- 400 Wrinkles, the Night-Watch Detective.
- 416 High Hat Harry, the Base Ball Detective.
- 426 Sam Slabsides, the Beggar-Boy Detective.
- 434 Jim Beak and Pal, Private Detectives.
- 26 Cloven Hoof, the Buffalo Demon; or, The Border Vultures.
- 32 Bob Woolf; or, The Girl Dead-Shot.
- 45 Old Avalanche; or, Wild Edna, the Girl Brigand.
- 53 Jim Bludsoe, Jr., the Boy Phenix.
- 61 Buckhorn Bill; or, The Red Rifle Team.
- 92 Canada Chet; or, Old Anaconda in Sitting Bull's Camp.
- 113 Jack Hoyle, the Young Speculator.
- 125 Bonanza Bill, Miner; or, Madam Mystery, the Forger.
- 133 Boss Bob, the King of Bootblacks.
- 141 Solid Sam, the Boy Road-Agent; or, The Branded Brows.
- 177 Nobby Nick of Nevada; or, The Sierras Scamps.
- 181 Wild Frank, the Buckskin Bravo; or, Lady Lily's Love.
- 236 Apollo Bill, the Trail Tornado; or, Rowdy Kate.
- 240 Cyclone Kit, the Young Gladiator; or, The Locked Valley.
- 273 Jumbo Joe, the Boy Patrol; or, The Rival Heirs.
- 330 Little Quick-Shot; or, The Dead Face of Daggersville.
- 338 First-Class Fred, the Gent from Gopher.
- 378 Nabob Ned; or, The Secret of Slab City.
- 382 Cool Kit, the King of Kids; or, A Villain's Vengeance.
- 438 Santa Fe Sal, the Slasher; or, A Son's Vengeance.
- 436 Sealskin Sam, the Sparkler; or, The Tribunal of Ten.
- 913 Kit Keith, the Revenue Spotter.
- 922 Sol Sharpe, the New York Night-Hawk.
- 943 Old Hayseed Among Bunco Men.
- 1001 Banty, the Denver Bootblack.

BY J. C. COWDRICK.

- 490 Broadway Billy, the Bootblack Bravo.
- 514 Broadway Billy's Boodle; or, Clearing a Strange Case.
- 536 Broadway Billy's "Dime-Kitty."
- 557 Broadway Billy's Death Racket.
- 579 Broadway Billy's Surprise Party.
- 605 Broadway Billy; or, The Boy Detective's Big Inning.
- 628 Broadway Billy's Dead Act; or, The League of Seven.
- 669 Broadway Billy Abroad; or, The Bootblack in Frisco.
- 675 Broadway Billy's Best; or, Beating San Francisco's Finest.
- 687 Broadway Billy in Clover.
- 696 Broadway Billy in Texas; or, The River Rustlers.
- 708 Broadway Billy's Brand.
- 711 Broadway Billy at Santa Fe; or, The Clever Deal.
- 720 Broadway Billy's Full Hand; or, The Gamin Detective.
- 735 Broadway Billy's Business.
- 738 Broadway Billy's Curious Case.
- 753 Broadway Billy in Denver.
- 762 Broadway Billy's Bargain; or, The Three Detective.
- 769 Broadway Billy, the Retriever Detective.
- 775 Broadway Billy's Shadow Chase.
- 783 Broadway Billy's Beagles; or, The Trio's Quest.
- 786 Broadway Billy's Tenna; or, The Combine's Big Pull.
- 790 Broadway Billy's Brigade; or, The Dead Alive.
- 796 Broadway Billy's Queer Bequest.
- 800 Broadway Billy Baffled.
- 805 Broadway Billy's Signal Scoop.
- 810 Broadway Billy's Wipe Out.
- 815 Broadway Billy's Bank Racket.
- 821 Broadway Billy's Bluff.
- 826 Broadway Billy Among Jersey Thugs.
- 833 Broadway Billy's Raid.
- 839 Broadway Billy's Big Boom.
- 844 Broadway Billy's Big Bulge.
- 849 Broadway Billy's \$100,000 Snap.
- 856 Broadway Billy's Blind; or, The Bootblack Stowaway.
- 862 Broadway Billy in London.
- 868 Broadway Billy Shadows London Slums.
- 874 Broadway Billy's French Game.
- 880 Broadway Billy and the Bomb-Throwers.

- 860 Silver-Mask, the Man of Mystery; or, The Golden Keys.
- 869 Shasta, the Gold King; or, For Seven Years Dead.
- 420 The Detective's Apprentice; or, A Boy Without a Name.
- 424 Clibuta John; or, Red-Hot Times at Ante Bar.
- 439 Sandy Sam, the Street Scout.
- 467 Disco Dan, the Daisy Dude.
- 506 Redlight Ralph, the Prince of the Road.
- 524 The Engineer Detective; or, Redlight Ralph's Resolve.
- 548 Mart, the Night Express Detective.
- 571 Air-Line Luke, the Young Engineer; or, The Double Case.
- 592 The Boy Pinkerton; or, Running the Rascals Out.
- 615 Fighting Harry, the Chief of Chained Cyclone.
- 640 Bareback Beth, the Centaur of the Circle.
- 647 Typewriter Tilly, the Merchant's Ward.
- 659 Moonlight Morgan, the "Pizenest" Man of Ante Bar.
- 887 Battery Bob, the Dock Detective.
- 894 Arizona Dick's Wipe-Out.
- 900 Jumping Jack's Jubilee.
- 906 Safety Sam, the Cycle Sport.
- 912 Train Boy Trist's Hot Hustle.
- 918 The Trump Dock-Boy.
- 924 Big Boots Bob, the Fire-Ladder.
- 930 Kustler Ralph, the Boy Spotter.
- 935 The Ex-Newshy Detective's Chum.
- 941 The Bowling Green Detective's Drop.
- 944 Cowboy Charlie's Double.
- 947 The Bowery Wrestler; or, The Butcher-Boy's Backer.
- 953 Paddy's Trump Card; or, Silver Sallie, the Girl Sport.
- 960 The Broadway Sport; or, Elver Fred's Clear Case.
- 967 \$1000 Reward; or, The Rival Reporters' Sleek Scoop.
- 973 Bantam Billy, the Corker-Ferret.
- 978 Plucky Pat, the Street-Boy Detective.
- 989 Bicycle Bob's Hot Scorch.
- 997 Scorch Sam, the Detective on Wheels.
- 1004 Scorch Sam's Sweep-Stakes.
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- 1033 You Bet Bob's Circus.

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- 1040 Buffalo Bill's Pony Patrol.
- 1013 Buffalo Bill's Texas Team.
- 1007 Buffalo Bill's Sure-Shots.
- 1000 Buffalo Bill's Decey Boys.
- 995 Buffalo Bill's Drop; or, Dead-Shot Ned, the Kansas Kid.
- 988 Buffalo Bill's Lasso Throwers.
- 981 Buffalo Bill's Fighting Five.
- 975 Buffalo Bill's Rifle Shots.
- 968 Buffalo Bill's Rush Ride; or, Sure-Shot, the High-Flyer.
- 964 Buffalo Bill's Decey; or, The Arizona Crack Shot.
- 958 Buffalo Bill's Mazeppa-Chase.
- 948 Buffalo Bill's Snap-Shot; or, Wild Kid's Texan Tally.
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